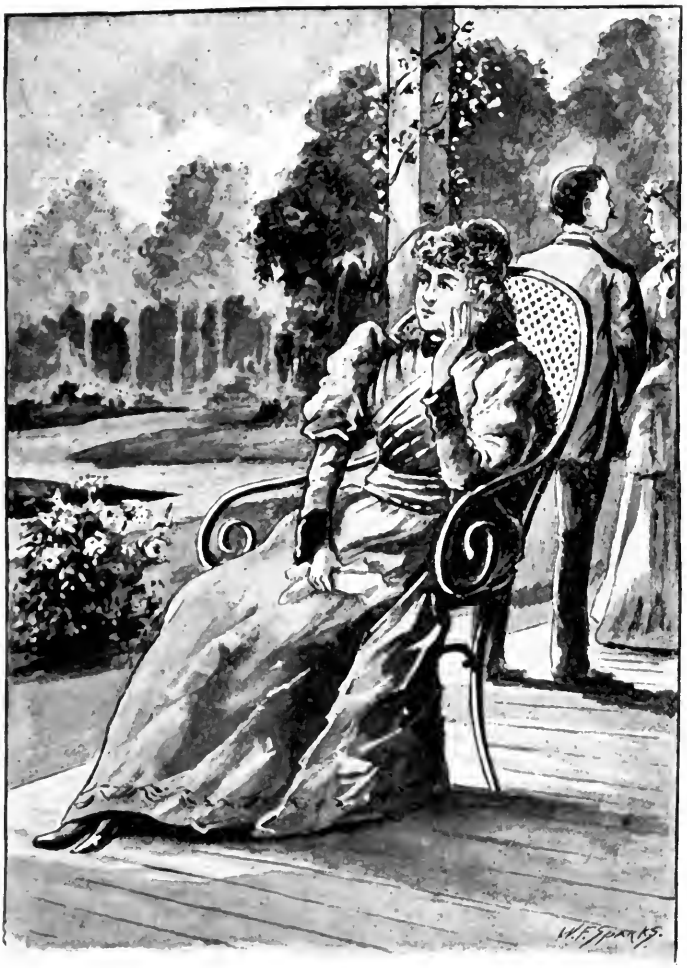
A SOUTHERN HERITAGE



SHE WENT DOWN TO THE VERANDA, WHERE SHE FOUND MR. HARRELL AND HER MAMMA, AND SAT FOR AN HOUR GAZING DOWN THE ROAD THAT LED TO THE STABLE.

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A SOUTHERN HERITAGE

BY

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CHAPTER I.

INTERRUPTIONS AND REMINISCENCES.

"My friend, you're becoming an anchoret—stop dreaming and—"

"This is the retirement of drudgery—not indolence."

It was Howard Estill's room. Floyd Claycourt had bustled in unceremoniously—a way he had of doing pretty much everything. He began talking before he got inside the door and, although what he said was of trifling consequence, kept busily at it.

"What are you doing—small fiction?—heavy articles?—it's dreaming, all the same. Ha, ha, pardon my audacity—you seem so solitary here—not enough sunlight in the room—such floods of light outside—you ought to get out and bask in it!'

"I can't throw off the harness."

"Really busy, eh? Well, don't want to put you out," Claycourt apologized, "but I hadn't seen you for such an age, thought I'd look up your hiding-place."

"Much work and steady application interfere with sociability."

"That's evident. Bad habit to fall into. You ought to break it up at once. Come, I'll lend you a hand—"

"Impossible— I'm not at liberty to adopt the occupation of an idler."

"But you can't scribble away in this den day and night without end? Upon my word, I believe you do! And it's making you look paler—blood growing thin. Ought to take a tonic—or what's better, shut your desk, and come into the country with me. You'll grow wrinkled and ugly if you don't—symptoms visible now—"

"Hush! Going to the country may be a good way to acquire color, but it's not a specific for anxiety."

"Why, what's upsetting you now? Girl in it?"

"Not particularly," Estill replied; "perhaps not one thing more than another. But you know there are some creatures that the Fates seem to combine against; I'm in their class."

"Now that's worse nonsense than most of mine," Claycourt rejoined, incredulously. "Get out of that smoking-jacket—where did you ever

get such an odd thing?—and let's go lunch at the club. You'll feel better after a bottle of wine ; I always do. Heard Worthington asking about you yesterday—mighty nice fellow, Worthy. Too bad he has such wretched taste in way of trousers—did you take notice what wild things he wears? I half suspect that he's trying to distinguish himself."

"Worthy ambition," remarked Estill ; "shouldn't wonder if he would become famous enough to write for the magazines. No, let me off to-day, my boy ; I'm not sure that the club atmosphere will agree with me."

"Hey? I don't believe I understand you."

"Well, the truth is, I had about made up my mind to quit the club, and Worthington, and all that sort."

"And what about me?"

"I was thinking of shaking you, too."

"Confound it, old chap, what sort of infernal, cantankerous disorder is eating into your vitals, anyway?" queried Claycourt, half impatient and altogether puzzled.

"Disappointment," replied Estill frankly. "I have been brought lately to recognize the fact that I don't belong in your set. A poor devil like me, without money or family or prospects—"

"Oh, come, now, don't take on in that melancholy strain. We'll both be taken with a bad spell, if you continue."

"I'm not whining," continued Estill; "I'm simply accepting the conditions. A fellow that has to drudge should keep to himself. Perhaps it would have been better for me if I had recognized that fact when I first came to New York. It might seem less of a privation to me now, if I had. But you see, Claycourt, I like jolly company, and good living and all that, too well—more than I can afford."

"Hear the man talk!" exclaimed Claycourt. "Anybody without eyes would imagine that he was a beggar."

"And not be so badly deceived, either," said Estill. "What can a hack-writer expect to have—"

"But you're a genius, you know! You'll strike it cream-rich some day, you know! Everybody knows about you, already—yes they do! Don't I hear of it! Come, you can't shake me on any such pretext as that!" and he added, mentally,—I'm too proud of going around with such a bright and captivating fellow.

"I have hoped," Estill resumed, "to accumulate something, and be able to live more like a gentleman. I got a few thousands, and made a venture with it—There was a most untimely drop in stocks yesterday, and—that's gone. I'm not superstitious, and I don't believe much in luck, or ill-luck, but everything that I have attempted, or worked for, or devoutly longed for, from the time I joined the Secession in '61 to the decline

on 'Change yesterday, has turned out wrong —and hang me if it doesn't grow monotonous!"

"Such things do," Claycourt sagely observed, lighting a cigar and giving one to Estill. "Let's hear about some of your other calamities."

"They're unpleasant to review," replied Estill, gloomily.

"Beg pardon—didn't mean to be unfeeling or inquisitive," said Claycourt, "but you don't look as if you ever had any trouble, and I'm not a little surprised."

"No; I don't show that I was doing hard soldiering when I was yet sixteen; nor that I lay for a year sick and half-starved in a military prison. I'm sure I don't look much as I did when I came out of Rock Island. Talk about calamities—our cause was lost, my father had been killed in fighting for it, my mother had died of grief and hardships, my only sister was left an invalid, our estate confiscated, or squandered, or lost, I never knew exactly which, and no one able to assist for us to turn to! Do you wonder that it is unpleasant to review those days?"

"You amaze me, old chap! But how did you manage to get on at all?" asked Claycourt in innocent wonderment; having no adequate idea of the terrors of such a condition.

"Worked, my boy, how do you suppose? Worked—clerked on a steamboat, newspaper reporter, hack writer—here I am."

Claycourt looked at him admiringly. Truly, Howard Estill must be a remarkable man, to have gone through all that and still be a prince among gentlemen! "He must have been exceedingly well bred, and have had splendid advantages before his hard luck began," thought Claycourt; which was much wiser, and truer than many of his observations.

Estill had intelligence, energy, and ambition; an attractive person and engaging manners. Considering all these great advantages, perhaps Mr. Claycourt is excusable for still refusing to comprehend how he could be dissatisfied and despondent. After smoking a moment in silence, Floyd asked:

"I have heard you mention your invalid sister before—has she recovered?"

"No. If there was nothing else to make a fellow unhappy, that would. She is scarcely able to walk, and there is not much promise now of her ever being any better. You see, I had been dreaming of getting together a snug little sum, having a home of my own, and having her with me—perhaps some one else, but her anyway. As I said, there was a most untimely depreciation in securities yesterday! I suppose poor Florence will have to remain with her aunt indefinitely, from present indications."

"I sincerely sympathize with you, Estill. I know how aggravating it is to have one's plans

frustrated so." And Claycourt tried to look a little regretful himself.

"You do?" asked Estill. "Yes, I imagine that you have had a tearful struggle with the cruel world."

"Ha, ha—dash it, man, don't be ironical. Do you suppose that any fellow ever gets through without having some trouble? Anyway, I insist upon our being cheerful now."

At this moment there was an interruption by the intrusion of a little man of brusque manners who presented his card to Estill with an air of stupendous importance. It bore the inscription:

BRICE MURCHISON,
LAWYER.
Unsettled Estates a Specialty.

Howard Estill scanned the bit of pasteboard a moment, and then turned it over as if he expected to find a skull and crossbones on the obverse side. But he did not find them. There was only a small stain, caused by contact with tobacco, or some other delicacy, in Mr. Murchison's pocket.

"Well," said Estill, glancing up at the lawyer.

"You have a large interest in an estate in the South, I am told," began Lawyer Murchison.

"You have been told so, eh? Well, did your informant mention how large the estate was?"

"I mean an interest in a large estate—a trivial error in my first statement, a slight carelessness. Yes, a large estate, to be sure."

"That's quite reassuring," replied Estill, in a not very encouraging manner.

"Perhaps it would be better to say a large interest in a large estate," continued Murchison. "That's what I understand. And I also understand that it has been sequestered."

"Sequestered is a good word—a right good word," Estill mused, again looking at the card. "Sit down again, my boy—don't go," he said to Claycourt, who began to fear that he might be in the way if any such important business was brought up. "There's no secret about this. Only a lawyer hunting up an old case to work on."

"Ahem! An *old* case! I have not so been informed. Has it ever been in the hands of competent attorneys? Has it ever been properly investigated? Has it ever—"

"It has never yielded me a cent, if that's what you are coming to," Estill interrupted him to say.

"Exactly, exactly," exclaimed Mr. Murchison triumphantly, as if he had already won an important suit.

"Do you expect it ever will yield you a cent unless you take proper steps to recover it? That's the question I would respectfully submit to you." And Mr. Murchison pretended to smile, the pretence consisting in drawing up one side of his

mouth—the left side—till a very uneven set of teeth was exposed.

"I don't want to enter into any discussion of the subject, or employ any lawyer in the case," said Estill impatiently. "I gave the whole thing up several years ago, after a vast deal of worrying and fretting about it, and there's enough troubling me now without dipping into it again."

"But suppose you had a man who took all the worry and responsibility on his own hands, did the work himself, and didn't charge you a cent till he had succeeded in getting hold of the property—"

"How do you know there is a property?"

"But there is, isn't there?"

"Not that I know of. Now don't question me, if you please. If you can find any tangible assets belonging to the estate of Edward Estill, deceased, formerly of Vicksburg, Mississippi, come and see me about it. That's all." Mr. Murchison was not quite so easily disposed of, but when he had gone, Howard smiled incredulously.

"I'm surprised that the old shark didn't try to work me for a retainer fee," he said. "'Unsettled estates a specialty.' Don't you surmise that he would make rather quick settlement of an estate that should come into his hands?"

"Rather. But if you are being beaten out of your rights, why *don't* you hire a good lawyer?"

"That's what I did. It's a long story, and too tedious to relate. It's a sequel to what I have

already told you about my war experience. After the conflict was ended, I got back to Vicksburg —not to my home; that had been destroyed completely by Grant's shells. My father had died in the service. I had been reported killed, and my mother, who had been prostrated by grief and terror, died during the siege. I had only a sister left. She was seven years old when I enlisted. I found her with a relative, but she had been hurt during that terrible ordeal, and she was a helpless little creature, destined for a life of misery. Everything was chaos. I inquired about my father's affairs. He had been a cotton factor, possessed of a comfortable property. As near as I could learn, he had converted it into money some time before the rebellion, probably foreseeing events. I found that his lawyer was also dead—killed in battle. It seemed as if that had been the fate of almost every one I should have sought for information or advice. What cotton there had been was, of course, confiscated or destroyed. There was nothing in any papers that I could discover that told of any other possessions. Yet I felt sure that my father left considerable money. At last I got an attorney to look for it. He was a sharp man, and I believe he took advantage of my youth and inexperience. I could never get satisfaction from him. At one time he professed to have evidence that my father had entrusted his wealth with a business acquaintance in Can-

ada; and he actually made a trip of investigation. But nothing came of it. Then my lawyer left Vicksburg, and my friends expressed the belief that he himself had found the money, and was squandering it for me. Next I heard of him in New York. It was too far away for me to follow him, then. I went to two or three other lawyers, in turn, but they couldn't do anything. There were no fees in sight. After a few years I came here. The first thing I did was to look for my first lawyer. What do you suppose had become of him? He had worked his way into State's prison. That was the end of Lawyer Sticey—he's there yet for all I know. And all we ever got out of my father's estate was a deed to some land in Alabama, which is said to be too rocky to pasture sheep on."

"A bad go all around," Claycourt observed when Estill had finished. "Sticey, did you say? Walker Sticey?"

"The same. Did you know him?"

"Heard of him. He got into politics and did something crooked. Of course he beat you—no doubt of it. Too bad! Still, as I said before, there's no use crying over what's lost."

"I wonder what I've been going all over it again for?" remarked Estill, meditatively. "Isn't it queer that sharps like that old fellow keep picking up things like this and nagging people about them?"

"Yes," answered Claycourt. "I suppose he'd make an ordinary person believe fairy stories about it and keep touching them constantly for fees and incidentals." Which implication that Mr. Estill was not at all in the rank of ordinary individuals made that gentleman smile.

"But you have'nt promised yet to come to the country with me," Claycourt exclaimed, changing the subject.

"It's too early in the season, and I haven't time," Howard objected. He seemed to have fallen into a reticent mood after finishing his reminiscences, and to be half-regretting that the subject had come up. So he let Mr. Claycourt indulge his harmless weakness in the way of garrulity for awhile without interrupting him.

"I've been out and tried it for a week, and am going back again to-morrow or next day. Splendid atmosphere—lots of room, pleasant spot. And girls!—my boy you ought to see the girls there! Not many—perhaps that's what makes them seem so lovely. Especially one or two. Perfectly charming, my boy!"

"Ye–es," responded Estill, mechanically.

"And country beauties, too. Bless my soul, old fellow, there *is* a girl you should see. She's a rare creature—beautiful; pure, natural complexion; sweet disposition; accomplished—and rich, too! Rich in her own right, *now*."

"What did you say that girl's name was?" asked Estill, starting from his reverie.

"Ha, ha, ha, that description catches you, does it? I thought I could invent one that would."

"What do you mean?"

"Only a fiction—there isn't any girl just like that, you know, ha, ha."

"I suppose you are right," Estill assented, with a shade of disappointment; "none left."

"But that doesn't make any difference. The girls at Ayresboro do very well, and I want you to come down with me."

"Where—Ayresboro? Why, that's where my sister lives. I go there frequently."

"The deuce you do! I never heard of it till my Aunt Kirkwood went there for the waters. You know they have a mineral-water spring there that gives forth a fluid a little nastier than anything else discovered yet; and the theory is that the curative qualities are in proportion to their malodorousness. You know, my aunt has tried about every spring in the country from Saratoga to Arkansas, and she has to recuperate in the summer for the social season. She's somewhat of an invalid, you know."

"Yes, I have heard of her."

"Everybody in town has. Most remarkable woman, my aunt!"

"In what way?"

"Why, as an invalid. That's her specialty. We

all thought she was going to die ten years ago. She's been a prominent figure in society every season since, and heaven knows how much longer she is going to keep it up! I've quit prophesying."

"Don't mean to intimate that you're disappointed?"

"Oh, no, no, no! Heaven forbid, as they always say on the stage. My aunt is a most interesting woman. We amuse each other. I pretend that I adore her, and she pretends that I bore her to death. Confidentially, it's part affectation in both of us. But it helps us get along beautifully. You must know my aunt."

"I have met her," remarked Estill.

"Oh, you have? Wasn't aware of it. Where?"

"At Saratoga, last summer. And Miss Kirkwood, too. Is she also at Ayresboro now?"

"Yes. I'm glad you know them. We'll have a jolly—"

"I don't think I'll go while they are there," Estill remarked. "I don't think it would contribute any to my peace of mind."

Claycourt looked somewhat mystified. He half remembered hearing something about a flirtation between his cousin and Howard Estill, but had never heard him speak of her. Besides, so many things of that nature came to his ears—it was not enough of a novelty to remember. And a year before he had not known Estill so

well. However, it pleased him now, if it had not terminated disagreeably, as Estill's words might imply.

"I hope there wasn't anything like a quarrel?" he said, inquiringly.

"Oh, not in the least. We didn't get well enough acquainted for that. I did not remain there many days, and the evening before I came away I did not see her, as I expected. I had an idea that she avoided me. Possibly I was wrong, but no doubt it was just as well."

"Ha, ha, why didn't you mention it to me before," laughed Claycourt, "and I would have taken you to call. That was selfish of you. Come, we go to-morrow."

Estill still refused, and Claycourt was about to leave in a disappointed mood, when the postman brought a letter. Estill opened and read it. "It is from my sister," he said. "She writes that she is not feeling so well, and wants me to come. I *will* go for a few days."

CHAPTER II.

FEMININITY, AND OTHER DIVERSIONS.

MRS. ORDLAW, after putting the finishing touches to a cosy room which she had been tidying with motherly care, took off her apron and folded it neatly with the strings inside. Good Mrs. Ordlaw was Howard Estill's aunt, and the room to which she had been giving her personal attention was intended for the reception of that gentleman. Whenever a visit from him was expected, the room, which was always dustless and orderly, as were all the rooms in Mrs. Ordlaw's cheerful dwelling, underwent a special brightening up and re-arranging. All the little home-like ornaments, in the way of small draperies, ribbon-bows, cushions, tidies, and other pieces of crochet-work, looked unusually fresh and delicate at such times; and when Mr. Estill took possession he would hesitate to sit down, or move around, for fear he would "muss up" something. He always felt like a burly, awkward animal in an exceedingly soft and dainty nest.

Florence Estill reclined in her invalid-chair, which had been moved out on the piazza;

ostensibly she was reading a novel; but most of the time her attention was directed down the street that led to the railway station, a mile distant. Thither Lot, the colored man-of-all-work, had gone with the horse and road-wagon, to fetch her brother Howard when he should arrive on the train.

"It's all snug and ready," announced Mrs. Ordlaw, coming out to assist Florence in looking expectantly down the street.

"I should like to go up and take a look at it," said Florence, "but I don't suppose I dare try, even with Ellen's strong help. I was worse for a fortnight afterwards the last time I attempted such a rash exploit."

"It would never do, at all," replied Mrs. Ordlaw. "Besides, I am sure that I have arranged everything just as you desired it should be, even to the pink ribbon on the rattan chair. Ellen has just taken up an ewer of soft water, and I know the dear boy will feel perfectly comfortable and at home there."

"I really hope he will," Florence answered with some show of anxiety; "for I always suspect that he is uneasy when he is here, and continually looking forward to the time when he shall go away. Poor Howard! I suppose he does find it dull and monotonous with us, else he would stay longer. We must try to keep him a month at least, this time, Aunt Sara."

"Yes, we must try very hard to," replied the good Aunt Sara, standing with a joyous face before the invalid girl. She had just spied Howard coming, yet a considerable distance away, and she wished to keep Florence unaware of it till he was nearer. But her effort was successful only for a moment. Florence caught the sound of Lot's tremendous voice, as he impatiently urged along the lazy horse.

"He's coming—I know he is," exclaimed Florence. "I hear Lot's roar of triumph. Yes, there they are, ha, ha, ha. Please help me a little, auntie, I want to wave my handkerchief. There, he sees it, the dear, darling boy! Oh, how I wish I could run down to the gate to meet him!" And a brighter color and a greater joy lit up the pale, pretty face of the helpless girl, than Aunt Sara had seen upon it for many weeks before.

Florence grew very weak, despite the excitement of her joy, and sank back in her chair. Howard lifted her tenderly in his strong arms, as if she had been an infant, and carried her indoors. And then he held her, and stroked her hair, and caressed her, while she told him over and over again how happy she was, and how she could not have endured another day without his coming. It was always so when he came, and every time he felt guilty for having remained away so long.

But at this meeting with his helpless sister Howard Estill had more regret and bitterness in

his heart to hide than at any previous one. Formerly, when he was younger, and considered her but a little girl, he had felt quite satisfied that she had a cheerful home with their kind aunt, and while he could have wished to be with her more, it had not caused him so much grief. Now that he was growing older, and she was learning to look more to him, he had become more thoughtful of her. He had for some time felt that instead of giving his time to the pursuit of his own pleasures and diversions, it was his duty to devote himself more to her. But how could he do it? He could not remain at Ayresboro, a prosy, insignificant village, that had no need of ambitious young men, and it would be impossible for him to give her the kind of home and care that she deserved in the city.

This duty had so forced itself upon him that he had to a considerable degree forsaken many of his former customs and acquaintances and redoubled his efforts toward raising himself to a more independent position. At twenty-six, he thought, a gentleman, even though cast entirely upon his own exertions, should not lack the means to properly care for an only sister. For a while things had gone satisfactorily, though in a slow way; and he had even hinted to Florence that the time might soon come when they should be together every day. He knew that of late she had been thinking a great deal about it, and that

she was very much interested in his success. What would he tell her now? His recent misfortune humiliated him.

But Florence's delight at his coming was too full to allow her to think about plans and future possibilities, much less to ask about them right away. And after a little, the lump went down out of his throat and he found it less difficult to be cheerful. Aunt Sara came flitting about, and Ellen, the maid, bustled in and out, and the rattle of dishes in the direction of the dining-roon indicated that tea was being got ready. Howard was soon making his toilet in the dainty little room, where he felt constantly in danger of spoiling something, everything seemed so choice and prim; and he kept wondering what ones of the decorations Florence had worked with her own feeble hands, probably with the view of making his surroundings pleasing and comfortable.

And when he came down, his little cousin Rilly had returned from somewhere, and he had a romp with her, as well as with the big St. Bernard dog, Bruno; all of which delighted Florence. So that the remainder of the day passed without his so much as thinking about the people over at the big hotel by the spring.

"By the way," he remarked the following morning at breakfast, "I understand there are some very elegant people this season at the Snowflake. Isn't it picking up?"

"Oh, very much," replied Mrs. Ordlaw; "Ayresboro has tried for several years to achieve reputation as a summer resort, without much success heretofore. But the Snowflake Inn has come into the hands of a new proprietor, who has advertised the mineral waters very extensively, refurnished the house, and it really seems as if the world was going to hear of us, after all."

"Yes; what a peculiar sensation it must be to the town," replied Howard. And then regretting his cynical remark, he hastened to say—"I have a few friends over at the Inn, that is, some acquaintances. I suppose I shall have to look in there to-day."

"Oh, how nice that will be," Florence exclaimed. "You will enjoy your stay here so much more, and be willing to stay longer, with more company and amusement here."

"No, little sister," Howard replied, smiling tenderly upon her; "I did not come for the company at the Snowflake, and they would have no influence whatever upon the length of my visit. I came only to see you, for I knew by your letter that you were weary; and I will stay as long as my duties will permit, which I am sorry to say will not be half as long as I wish, company or no company.

"But I know it must be so different here from your busy, exciting life in the city. I know I

can have no correct idea of what it is like there; but this must seem very quiet in contrast."

"Ha, ha, Florence is making me out a martyr," laughed Howard. "A peculiar martyrdom, to come away from the whirl and noise and heat, to this pleasant nook! I'm only sorry I can't do all my work here."

"At any rate, you must have a nice time and get rested. They are going to have hops at the Inn."

"Are, eh? Ha, ha, hops are such glorious things to rest up on! One feels so like getting up early the next morning and going vigorously at work! No, I refuse to become enthusiastic over the prospects of the society season, dear aunt. I'd rather spend my time here playing with the little girls and Bruno." He knew this would please Florence. He really liked to dance, and enjoyed the gaiety of the ball-room; but he would not have allowed his poor invalid sister, who would never be able to taste of such pleasures, to suspect that they, more than his love for her, had anything to do with bringing or keeping him there. "But I have a friend, Mr. Claycourt; a jolly fellow, who is there with some relatives; came with me to-day. I will bring him over, Florence. I believe he will amuse you. Just a club acquaintance, but he comes around to see me, and is sociable. Rather like him. Like most fellows of his class, takes odd notions now and then. Hope

you'll find him interesting. By the way, where is Bessie Medlock? Is she as companionable as ever?"

"Dear Bessie grows more charming all the time. I am sure I don't know how I should live without her, now. She comes almost every day, and reads or sings to me. Since her mother died a year ago I think she gets lonely at home. And indeed we have very pleasant times together."

Howard was greatly pleased to hear this. It would have made him very unhappy to hear Florence complain of being lonely or neglected. He was just thinking in what manner it would be best for him to show his gratitude to Miss Bessie for her kindness when that young lady appeared. "What a beauty she is getting to be," thought Howard; "developed wonderfully since last summer. Nothing artificial about her either; I wonder what any girl ever 'makes up' for? Why can't they understand how much more attractive they are without it. There's something wonderfully charming about this sort of sweet simplicity. Wonder what Claycourt would say if he saw her? Perhaps it would be just as well for him *not* to see her."

Mr. Estill's pleasing mental soliloquy on the unaffected village beauty made him unaware that he was gazing upon her with admiring eyes; and if Bessie had remained quiet it might have lasted much longer. But seeing that she became some-

what embarrassed under his critical view, he left the two girls alone and strolled down to the Inn.

It was nearly midday, and there were a number of loungers upon the wide balcony. Among them he found Claycourt. "You look luxuriously idle," Estill remarked to him.

"Yes, that's my present condition," was the reply. "I have been devoting a part of the morning to my aunt, but as she is feeling pretty poorly she found me vexatious, and released me. Poor aunt!"

"Is she really unable to be up?"

"Only a part of the time. She's just taken a turn down to the spring with Harrell. Know Blake Harrell? No? He's a rather smooth sort of chap—not bad. There they come, now. Let's go down that way—she'll remember you, no doubt."

Estill was somewhat surprised at the appearance of the much-pitied invalid, who was so poorly. She seemed able to walk well enough, though she carried a richly-ornamented walking-stick. She looked really beautiful, in her light morning gown, with a white, fluffy wrap thrown carelessly around her shoulders, and her wealth of blond hair done up in a most attractive fashion. She had a constant attendant in a faithful English woman, who watched her every motion, and humored her every whim. Why she did it,

so cheerfully and uncomplainingly, can not be reasonably accounted for; for it was never once observed that the invalid showed a spark of gratitude. But there might have been some expression of it behind the scenes.

The gentleman who had been walking with her took his leave as they approached the house, and Mrs. Kirkwood sank wearily in her large, easy chair when she reached the veranda. She received Estill very graciously.

"Indeed I remember you very well," she said, when he mentioned their limited acquaintance the season before; "and I have often heard Olive speak of you. Really, I think you must have made quite an impression on Olive's heart—the silly young thing. You know what silly things all girls are. Floyd, don't whistle, it shocks me! Pray sit down, Mr. Estill. I'm really glad you came. I feel that I am in exile here. But I must undergo anything, you know, that may benefit my wretched health—Hopson, my hassock—not that one; the large one! No. the small one!—Don't you admire the picturesque wilderness of the surroundings, Mr. Estill? If I were not a confirmed invalid how I would enjoy a gallop over these hills. Do you ride much?"

"Not much of late years. I have tried it here occasionally, but the horses are unsatisfactory."

"I am told that some good ones have been

brought here. Indeed, I feel like attempting a ride, as poorly as I am."

"It would never do in the world, my darling aunt. You would faint in the saddle," interrupted Floyd.

"What nonsense you are guilty of, Floyd! I believe you take a delight in shocking me with your terrible predictions and suppositions! Isn't that a cruel way to treat an invalid, Mr. Estill?—Hopson, raise this cushion a trifle."

"I hope you find the waters here beneficial?" said Howard, interrogatively, thinking that perhaps for the sake of harmony it were better to change the subject from horses and riding.

"Oh, I am not sure that anything is of much benefit to me. I really believe that if I should take to horseback-riding in this delightful atmosphere it would do me a world of good. Floyd, what did Mr. Kirkwood do with Selim, the beauty that I used to ride? Sold him, of course! Thought I would never have any use for him again, I suppose. Ha, ha, that's one of the pleasant features of being an invalid, Mr. Estill—those around you always counting upon your dying, sooner or later. But Selim was a noble animal—Kentucky stock. Were you ever in Kentucky, Mr. Estill?"

"Frequently. I very well know its reputation for horses, and some other products."

"Ha, ha, I know what you mean by other products; Northerners all affect that sneer."

"But I'm not a Northerner, except by adoption."

"Are you really from the South? I might have known it. It's easy enough to detect a southern-bred gentleman. They show it in their manners—even in their smiles."

"And they smile frequently," put in Claycourt.

"Oh Floyd, how you do rattle!" exclaimed Mrs. Kirkwood in a voice filled with rebuke, affecting to be distressed at her nephew's familiar joke. "I don't see how you can be guilty of such inexhaustible foolishness! Don't be offended, Mr. Estill; the Southerners should know each other better. Am I from the South? I am proud of being a Georgian. I presume you have heard of the Ravensworths? I am a Ravensworth—one of the oldest families in the State." And having hit upon the topic that gave her greatest satisfaction to discuss, Mrs. Kirkwood talked energetically. Her vanity had something of State patriotism in it, and was not disagreeable to Howard Estill; although he volunteered but few comments, fearing to be led again into relating his own history.

Purely in the light of character study, however, Howard remarked to himself that she appeared to be one of the most artificial women he had ever known. She did not seem possessed of a

single earnest sentiment or laudable desire. Her opinions were whims, her reasons contradictions. He even doubted if she were really a genuine invalid. What a contrast to the invalid he had left an hour before! If one could have looked deep into his heart, there would have been very little sympathy found in it for Mrs. Kirkwood.

Yet it was plain to Floyd that his aunt liked Estill. "It is a little strange," he thought, "for he does not flatter her at all. And it must be admitted that my poor aunt likes flattery, judiciously administered."

Mrs. Kirkwood talked herself weary, although she attributed it to other and more sinister causes; and after she had been bundled off indoors by Hopson, with her fluffy wraps and cushions, Floyd breathed a sigh of relief. "She always gets worse suddenly," he remarked.

"It's more dramatic," Howard was on the point of replying, but checked himself and said, instead, "She appears to be very weak and nervous."

"Oh, this was one of her good mornings. Your presence seemed to revive her. She takes to you kindly. Haven't seen her so entertaining and vivacious before for many a day. Hope she won't have a total relapse after it." And while Floyd talked Howard was wondering just what sort of entertainment she afforded for those around her when she was passing through a period of "total relapse."

What a change of situation it was when Olive Kirkwood joined them! She returned from a ramble a few minutes after Mrs. Kirkwood's retirement, and showed such unmistakeable pleasure at seeing Howard Estill, that his suspicion about her wishing to avoid him immediately vanished. Her presence was refreshing. No complaints about wrongs and ills, no whimsical commands, no sarcasm, no artificial pretences—so far as Estill observed. "Is it possible," he thought, "for this charming girl to be the daughter of that woman!"

Claycourt soon found a convenient excuse for absenting himself from the group, apparently with much indifference, but really with a well-defined motive; and as soon as he had gone Estill observed that Olive grew a trifle more serious in her manner. "I warrant she doesn't thank Floyd for going," he mused. "Wonder what would be the most re-assuring subject to talk about? Ahem! I am not sure Miss Kirkwood, but this rugged spot may be a Saratoga in embryo," he remarked after a moment's hesitation. And then immediately accused himself of blundering. "What the devil did I say anything about Saratoga for!" he grumbled to himself; "ought to have let *her* bring that up, if she wanted to."

"Very likely," answered Olive; "it has springs and"—

"Springs," suggested Howard, seeing that she was at some loss to mention other points of resemblance. "The parallel seems to end there, for that's about all either place possesses, naturally. We must admit, though, that this spot has a little the best of it in the way of scenery—a little more variety."

"But the waters are so awfully bitter! I don't see how they can do any one any good," she said.

"It seems to be a peculiar ordinance that so much of what is calculated to do us good *is* bitter," he remarked sagely. After which profound observation both remained silent for a moment. "I don't seem to have hit just the right vein yet," thought Estill.

"You did not remain long at the springs last summer," Olive said, breaking the silence.

"No, I ran up there just for a few days, more out of curiosity than anything else," he answered. "I am a busy man, and have very little time to spend at pleasure resorts," and added mentally—"I suppose it would have been more honest and manly if I had said, 'time *or money*,' but I didn't have the nerve."

"I remember that you told me you were going the next day, and I expected to see you at the ball that night, but poor mamma was feeling so poorly I did not dare to leave her."

"I was sorry to have missed you," he replied,

"and it is very conscientious of you to have remembered about it till now."

It did not appear entirely satisfactory to Olive that he gave her credit only for remembering it as a duty; but she did not attempt to express her feeling. "I hope you will make a longer visit here," was her answer.

Howard then told her about his sister, and why he came. "I have not been here before since Christmas, and Florence no doubt felt that I was neglecting her. Perhaps I was," he added thoughtfully.

"I am glad to hear that you have a sister," Olive said; "I always feel that a young gentleman is much more apt to have right ideas of womankind if he has a sister to influence him."

"You are quite a moralist. Yes, I suppose it does tend in some degree to increase confidence in a fellow."

"But I am exceedingly sorry to learn that yours is so unfortunate. I should like so much to see her . . . if she would only let me call upon her."

This was something entirely unexpected. He had mentioned his sister by way of explanation, not dreaming that Miss Kirkwood would evince any interest in her—why should she? That would have implied that she felt some interest in him, which was a somewhat absurd conclusion, to be sure!

"Why, it is very good of you, Miss Kirkwood, and I have no doubt that poor Florence would be greatly pleased to have you come. But she is quite timid, you know, and sensitive to the fact that she is at such a disadvantage—"

"Oh, I am sure that she would not feel so with me," Olive interrupted him to say; "I think we would be very good friends. And you know that poor mamma has been an invalid so much that I fancy I can very readily adopt myself to their conditions. I fear that you have imagined me to be entirely impractical and incapable." This was not very far from what Mr. Estill's impressions of her had been, but he hastened to revise them so that he could assert without greatly violating the truth, that he had not dreamed of being so rash and unjust. "Still, one would not naturally go among the Saratoga set to seek for a young lady of really useful qualities," was his mental reservation.

At this paragraph in their conversation Floyd reappeared, with a gun. "What are you doing here with that Winchester," inquired Howard, who was pretty well up in fire-arms, and saw at a glance that it was a first-class breech-loader of the latest invention.

"Yes, I wonder; he was prowling around with it this morning," said Olive. "I really believe that he is afraid of Indians up here."

"I wish there were a few of the obstreperous

ones from the frontier parcelled out here, at a respectable distance—I'd like to try this pretty thing on them," said Floyd unfeelingly, which shocked Olive so that, after rebuking him for such lack of sympathy for the red man and brother, she went into the house.

"You seem to be panting for war," observed Estill. "Are you much of a shot?"

"That's what I would like to find out," replied Claycourt; "I'm pretty fair at a target, but I haven't had an opportunity to try it at anything alive."

"There's nothing up here for that sort of gun," said Howard, "especially at this season. You might start up a deer back among the hills if it were autumn."

"I'm not particular what sort of game it is, though I should prefer bear if I had my choice. Biggest thing I've been able to see yet is a chipmunk."

"Did you wing him?" asked Howard, amused.

"No—I didn't have my gun," answered Claycourt regretfully.

"You ought to keep it along with you," Howard observed dryly, and smiled patronizingly as Floyd exhibited the new piece, and explained its peculiar mechanism and capabilities, enthusing over it exactly like a small boy with a new spring-top.

"I'll join you in a match at target-shooting some day," Estill suggested, "and handicap myself by

two hundred yards. I think that ought to make us about even."

Claycourt replied to this rather boastful offer with a slangy sort of remark, something to the effect that Mr. Estill was guying himself; but confidently accepted the challenge.

"You ought to have been on deck with that thing ten years ago," Estill observed; "you would not have found such scarce opportunities to work it then."

"But your chances of being killed would have been so much the greater. I'd have been firing your way, you know," answered Mr. Claycourt, logically.

"Not as great as now, I imagine, judging from the way you're handling the infernal machine," Estill replied, changing his position for about the twentieth time.

"There's only one slug in it," said Claycourt apologetically; as if it would have taken the whole magazine full to have harmed an old warrior like Estill.

When Howard looked out of his window that afternoon, he saw Claycourt, in shooting-jacket, prancing off toward the woods with his pet rifle; and smiled derisively.

CHAPTER III.

A FAINT SMELL OF POWDER.

"WHERE is Rilly?" asked Howard Estill of his sister Florence, after he had sat by her reclining-chair reading to her for some time. It was late in the afternoon on the second day of his visit.

"She went with Bessie Medlock to the glen, just before you came down. Bessie is going to do some sketching—she shows a great deal of taste for it, you know—and Rilly is going to gather ferns and wild lilies."

"Heaven save us!" exclaimed Howard, with more emphasis than piety, "and that fellow Claycourt loose with his weapon of destruction." And then seeing Florence's fright at his remark, he laughed. "Of course there's not one chance in a million of his doing them any injury," he explained; "but it suddenly occurred to me that I saw him tramping in that direction an hour or two ago, and he's extremely likely to be blazing at something; which might frighten the girls. That's all."

"Is he very prudent with his gun?" asked Florence.

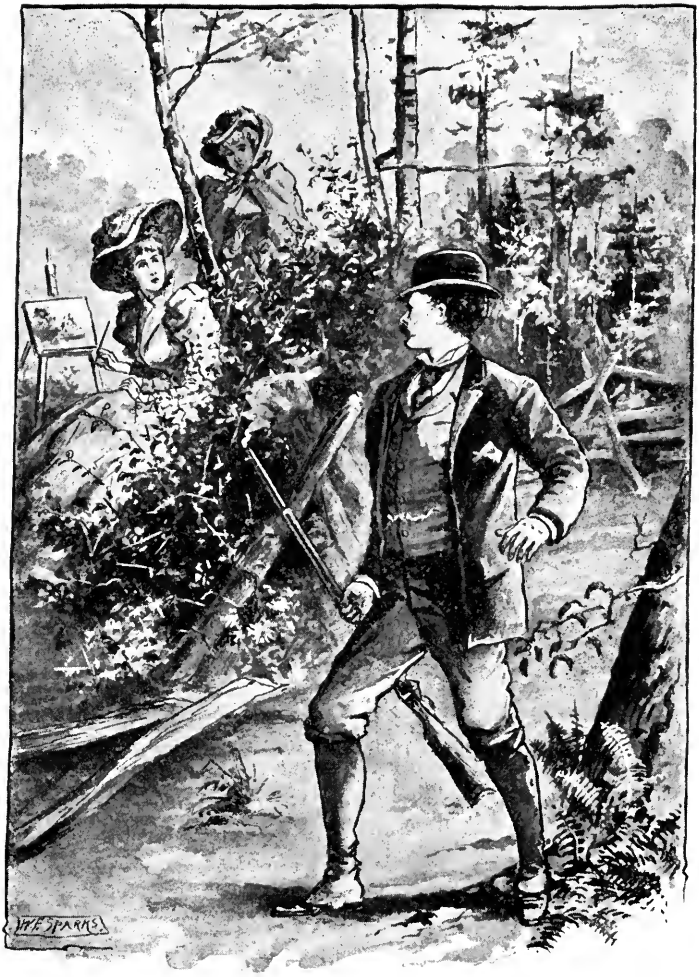
"From what I saw of him I should say that his

awkwardness was only equalled by his enthusiasm," replied Howard. "But don't be uneasy, my girl. It would be a miracle if he hit anything but a mountain."

Ping! rang out a sharp, distant report, that came from the direction of the glen.

"There it goes," said Howard, laughing. "I know the peculiar crack of a rifle. That's Floyd. He found another chipmunk, perhaps. It would be a good joke if some one could extract all his cartridges and then send a few made-up Indians after him. Ha, ha, ha, I warrant he would make a more frightened retreat than our enemy did the first day at Shilo. I shall have to watch for him, and see if he has any game when he returns."

Claycourt had wandered around and stumbled over rocks industriously for a long time without even meeting with as much success as Estill had expected—the sight of a chipmunk. He was somewhat disappointed and tired, and turning his steps homeward, when he determined to fire his piece off once or twice, if for no other purpose than to make a noise. He was trudging along the smooth banks of the purling mountain brook, and glancing continually up among the trees. Gar, gar, gar! screamed a blue-jay very saucily, having discovered some more peaceable bird hovering in his neighborhood. Gar, gar, gar—"get away from here or I'll make short work of you."



"I BEG PARDON A THOUSAND TIMES FOR DISTURBING YOU SO," HE SAID, POLITELY.
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"He's my own little birdie," said Floyd, leveling at the garrulous and jealous jay; "I'll make short work of him."

There was a flash, and Howard Estill, sitting reading to his sister far away, heard the report; but he did not hear the scream of affright that was uttered not twenty paces behind Claycourt where he stood aiming his rifle. The doughty hunter heard it, though, and turned quickly. "In the name of Nimrod," he exclaimed to himself, "could I have hit anybody back there!" He saw a young lady start from a clump of mulberry, in the shade of which she had been quietly seated, looking very much alarmed. "Happy star," continued Floyd in supplement to his first exclamation; "it's my sweet country beauty, and no chance for mistake." Starting quickly in her direction—"I beg pardon a thousand times for disturbing you so," he said politely (though of course he had only begged it once); "really I hope you are not badly shocked." He did not specify whether he meant, at the report of his rifle or the extent of his conventional falsehood. "It isn't anything worse than a scare, is it?" he continued coming nearer.

"No, I believe not," answered Bessie Medlock in embarrassment—for it was she and Rilly Ordlaw.

"I'm ecstatically delighted to hear it. Wasn't dreaming of disturbing anybody, you know; wouldn't had done it for empires—not for worlds."

"Why, did you shoot this way?" she inquired anxiously, as if there might be a sort of hold-over or second-session of danger yet, if he had.

"Oh, no, no,—heaven be praised,—ha, ha, no, no," replied Mr. Claycourt rapturously. "But you know I felt a little dazed and uncertain, you know, when I heard your voice. In fact, for a moment I hardly knew, you know. Now pray don't let me annoy you further—I'm perfectly peaceable and harmless, you know. I see you were sketching—now *don't* let me break it all up —that would be calamitous. *You* an't afraid, are you little girl (addressing himself to Rilly)? Of course not, that's right. Now you will grieve me greatly if you don't go on again with your drawing, Miss— Ah, excuse me—" and Mr. Claycourt brought all his resources into play for a masterly stroke of audacity; "excuse me, I fear I am being too bold. I have seen you in the village and happen to know that you are Miss Medlock. Let me introduce myself—Mr. Claycourt, Floyd Claycourt. Stopping with relations at Snowflake Inn. From New York. Assure you my family is highly respectable. You have heard of Mrs. Kirkwood and Miss Kirkwood at the Snowflake?"

"Yes," answered Bessie timidly.

"My relatives," resumed Floyd; "would be glad to have you know them."

Poor Bessie was secretly very much pleased at this, though still showing considerable embarrass-

ment. In her simplicity, she felt that it was quite an honor to be invited to know so important a family as the Kirkwoods were said to be; and even if Mr. Claycourt did exhibit a degree of assurance that she had not been accustomed to, he did it in a very genteel and agreeable way.

"I am sure you are very kind," she replied.

"Oh, not at all. Only forget that I have been rude, and let us feel more acquainted. Ah, this little girl's name is, ah—did you mention it?"

"Rilly Ordlaw," answered Rilly promptly, before Bessie could speak.

"Shake hands, Rilly—I'm a great friend to little girls like you. Let me see, Ordlaw?"

"I am quite intimate with Mrs. Ordlaw's family, but we are no relation," explained Bessie with charming simplicity.

"Oh, yes, to be sure. I've heard of the family—why, isn't that where Miss Estill lives? Of course. Her brother, Howard Estill, and I are great chums—came over from New York together, you see. Why, that makes us almost old friends, doesn't it, Rilly. You know Mr. Estill, Miss Medlock?

"His poor sister is my dearest friend," replied Bessie, "but as Mr. Estill has not been here so much I have never come to know him quite so well."

"Exactly. Pardon me, would you mind letting

me look at your drawing? I use the pencil a little myself."

"Do you, indeed? Then I would not dare show you my work; I am very poor at it yet." And Bessie looked more modest and beautiful. "I'm afraid we are keeping you from your hunting," she continued suggestively.

"Not at all. I had finished and was going home," was Floyd's hurried reply. "I only halted a moment to fire my blunderbus at a noisy blue-jay."

"Did you hit it?" inquired Rilly with childish curiosity.

"Well, yes, I think I must have; I haven't seen a symptom of him since," answered Floyd triumphantly. "This is a most effective weapon, you know; a magnificent gun. Did you ever see one of these newly-improved machines, Miss Medlock? It's really very interesting; works something like a coffee-mill, see?" Click, click, it went, under Floyd's manipulation. "When I open it this way it throws out the empty shell, see? That's the one that did the blue-jay." Click, click. "I work it this way and that throws another in place from the magazine, here—see?" Click, click. "I close it this way, and there it is, ready again, see?"

"What, is it loaded now?" asked Bessie apprehensively.

"Six more slugs in it yet."

"Oh, Goodness! And you handling it like that?"

"Pray don't be afraid of it; it's as safe as a tin whistle," said Mr. Claycourt in his most reassuring tones. But Rilly looked at the mysterious, clicky instrument with a great deal of awe, and showed an inclination to keep in the protecting shelter of Bessie's graceful form.

Floyd Claycourt was happy. Ever since the first day he came to Ayresboro he had been smitten with Bessie's beauty and artless manner, and had more than once exercised his ingenuity to discover some plan to make her acquaintance. To be entirely truthful, he had at first attempted, in the usual way, to open a flirtation with her, but she had appeared not to notice or understand him. If he had been given his choice he could not have arranged a meeting with her more to his liking than this. There was an air of uniqueness and romance about it that one was not permitted to experience every day.

So he chatted away in very high spirits, and exerted himself to his utmost to be fascinating and agreeable. Bessie declared that it had grown too late for her to resume her sketching, and Mr. Claycourt urged, that in view of their mutual friendships, he might be permitted to acompany them homeward; especially as he was going the self-same way when he was so unfortunate as to frighten Miss Medlock. He hoped she had quite

recovered from it?—which she had. And they gathered up Rilly's stock of ferns and wild flowers, which Floyd insisted in bearing the burden of, while they rambled slowly toward the village. It was remarkable what good friends Floyd and Rilly became, and how well Bessie had recovered her self-possession.

Howard Estill had, having got started by discussing some of Mr. Claycourt's characteristics, told Florence about the Kirkwoods, mother and daughter; where and how he had met them, and how Miss Olive had expressed a desire to come and see her; and had resumed his reading, when they heard a merry laugh.

"That is Rilly," said Florence. "She and Bessie have had a long stroll together. I'm glad they are coming back."

Howard leaned over the railing of the piazza and looked down the walk. "Well, upon my soul!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "I said I would watch for Claycourt's return. He's bringing in our girls, and they seem to be very willing captives. Shall I have him come in?"

"I should like very much to see him—he must be jolly. But I was not aware that Bessie knew him—wonder where they got acquainted?" Howard was shrewd enough to guess at once pretty close to the way it had come about. "It's quite in the line of that fellow's surprises," he remarked,

as he called to Floyd to come in; and followed it up by going part way to the gate to meet him.

Then there was a very merry party, after Claycourt had been introduced to Florence; all three of the new arrivals telling in turn or all together how their meeting had occurred, and what a pleasant time they had had coming home. Perhaps Bessie was less talkative than the others, for some way she felt that Howard and Florence might not fully comprehend just how natural and unavoidable it all had been. But Mr. Claycourt kept up such a fire of talk, and jokes, and marvellous stories about the game he had encountered and come near bagging, that there wasn't much chance for any awkwardness or embarrassment.

"You are an audacious wretch," Howard said to him the next morning when he encountered him at the Inn. "Isn't it rather a new scheme to paralyze a young lady with fear in order to get acquainted with her?"

"Oh, come, now, don't be so incredulous," Claycourt retorted; "there wasn't a suspicion of premeditation about it. What, would you have had me run away and leave the gentle things screaming? Allah forbid! Besides, old chap, it's all right. You needn't be uneasy about my actions toward Miss Bessie. What fellow could think of imposing on any one so perfectly innocent and unaffected and beautiful and altogether love—"

Estill interrupted his extravagant panegyric

with a laugh, else there is no telling how much longer it might have been. "Seems to me I've heard you in that sort of raving before. Always the newest conquest, eh?"

"Never anything like this before," protested Claycourt.

"Tush! It was the same sort of talk about somebody, at my room in town, a few days ago."

"This is the same fair creature. I had seen her when I first came down. Hadn't I a right to be enthusiastic?"

"Well," said Howard, after pausing awhile, "is this the end of it?"

"I hope not. It's only the beginning."

"What sort of an ending do you predict there will be?"

"Oh, that's going too much into the future, you know. How can I guess at that?"

"Have you thought what effect your acquaintance with that young girl might have upon her happiness?" asked Estill, rather seriously.

"Man alive, hear him talk!" exclaimed Claycourt. "I am not going in to break her tender heart."

"Didn't suppose you were. But wouldn't it be too bad if you only half did it, even without intending to? She is of an ardent temperament, and inexperienced. To be frank with you, as a friend ought to be, I don't think you ought to run the risk of making her unhappy. You know

you won't think of her again after you get away from here."

"Won't, eh? Think I'm just fooling, eh? Come now, how could a fellow be trifling with a girl like that! Don't worry, old chap. You spoke about shaking me the other day. Do it when you think I haven't acted right with her! Isn't that enough?"

"Yes."

"And now look here: girls and other nonsense out of the way, I've got a scheme for you. I have had a thought, or an idea, or an inspiration —something of that sort. You needn't look incredulous. It came to me when I woke up this morning. Be quiet and listen: You were feeling rather broken up the other day about things going wrong in a financial way. Now, it occurred to me you ought to be in something bigger. There's my uncle, Watson Kirkwood—why can't you go in with him? He could make room for you, and put you in the way of getting rich. You know him?"

"Not well. Broker, isn't he?"

"Broker, banker, promoter, bonds, mortgages —everything like that. Great man, my Uncle Kirkwood is—born financier. He's almost as remarkable in *his* way as my aunt is in *her* way. He's promoted more enterprises than any other man in the country. Just the man for you to get in with—you would be valuable to each other.

He has more business than three men ought to look after. Don't you see?"

"Why don't you go in with him?" asked Estill.

"Me? What's the use? I an't hustling much —my prospects are good enough now. Uncle's coming down here Saturday, and I'd like to make it up between you two."

"You are exceedingly kind, old fellow, and I appreciate it. But don't you think it would be better to let us get acquainted, and study each other up a bit, before broaching the subject to him?"

Claycourt thought it might do well enough, but that there was not much use wasting time. "Uncle Wat is sharp and quick, and can tell instanter whether or not he wants to have anything to do with a fellow. But just as you like, of course."

Howard admitted that it was quite an idea—one to do credit to Claycourt—if it were at all possible to be carried out. It might be the making of his fortune. Especially if Mr. Kirkwood was such a man as Claycourt had described him. And then came other ideas into his head—thoughts about Miss Kirkwood, and his sister, and Mrs. Kirkwood. What if he *should* become identified in a business way with Mr. Kirkwood. It would have been quite easy for him to go on to building castles in the air; but he was too

practical for that, and soon dismissed the subject from his mind as being yet too intangible to dwell upon.

While he was loitering in the corridor of the Inn he met a tall man, with an aquiline nose, a smoothly shaven face, and wearing a slouch hat. The tall man looked down upon him and exclaimed in surprise—"What, Howard Estill? God bless you, my lad! I'm glad to see you—right glad to see you."

"My old Major Derryberry!" Howard responded, as they shook hands cordially; "this is a pleasure. We haven't met before since a year after the war, on that Mississippi steamboat. Where *have* you been, though?"

"Various places," replied the tall major, as they seated themselves for a talk.

"And what are you in now?"

"Running this hotel. Took it last spring. Going to make a world-wide reputation for the place, too." And he went over again for Howard as he had done a thousand times to others, the great advantages of the place, the remarkable properties of the water, and the prospects of their wonderful success in the future. Howard was very glad to greet his old major, for he always liked him; he had a fatherly manner, great self-confidence and a healthy flow of good spirits.

"I went to Brazil after our cause failed," he said, "feeling that I didn't want to stay where I

had been getting so much the worst of it. But a couple of years there was enough for me. This seemed to be a pretty good land after all, when I got back to it. Bless me if I wasn't half glad to see the old stars and stripes again. Been keeping hotel since. Now tell your story."

Howard ran over his experiences in a sketchy fashion. "So your lawyer, Sticey, never succeeded in getting hold of any funds belonging to your estate? That's queer. Your father left means, I know. Oh, I'm sure of it. It has missed connection somewhere. I wouldn't give it up yet."

But when Howard told the major of Sticey's actions it so exasperated him that he pronounced a soldier-like curse upon the renegade, and took a chew of tobacco.

"I was down in West Virginia a couple of years ago looking at some coal land, and at a little station among the hills I heard some one say—"An't dat you, Mas' Der'burry?" I looked around and saw a nigger—that one that stuck to your father after the emancipation proclamation."

"Not Zeb?"

"That's the coon, Zeb. 'What are you doing up here Zeb,' says I. 'Fahmin, sah,'—and that's what he was. I asked him if he knew where you were, but he didn't; and I had not run against anybody lately who did. Yes, it was Zeb. Queer how our niggers scattered about, isn't it?"

"But why do you think my father left property or money in such way or place that it could not be readily found? It would have been easy enough to have left vouchers, a record—"

"And no doubt he did," broke in the major; "not the least bit of doubt of it. But they fell into the wrong man's hands. I don't reckon you will ever get any good from it now, from what you say about Sticey. Anyway, you are no more unfortunate than the rest of us—not so much, for it's damned unpleasant to have to start all over again at middle time of life."

"To be sure. With me it was only losing something I never had, but was entitled to. I should like to see that negro Zeb. I never thought of it before, but he was with my father till a short time before his death, I believe. It's possible he might remember something that would give me a clew—he was a pretty wide-awake boy. I know that he was with him awhile when he lay wounded. What station was it that you saw him at?" Howard's talk with the major had set him to searching for possibilities again, though he had often declared that he would trouble his mind no further with the stubborn case.

Major Derryberry told him where it was and how to get to it. Then invited him in to partake of a mint-julep, and would have had him to dine if Estill had not politely declined.

"I am going to leave you to-morrow for a little business trip over into West Virginia," he said to Florence when he returned from the Inn. "Only for a day—that is, if I can get there and back again in that time. Let us look it up." And he got out a map, and time-schedule, and they soon had their heads together trying to settle the question.

"Here it is—Rose Valley," he said, pointing out the place; "off here, on a branch road. Named after the wild roses in it, perhaps. Let's see, trains going west—number three, at 4.45 in the morning. Beastly hour to get up, I say. And I can't get back till 10 at night. Anyway, it's all in a day, and I'll stay two days longer, my deary, to make it up. Isn't that fair?"

CHAPTER IV.

A JOURNEY AND AN INTRODUCTION.

"I KNOW this seems very much like a wild-goose chase," Howard soliloquized, as he stood sleepily on the platform the next morning, waiting for the early west-bound train to come along. "It's not one chance in forty that Zeb can give me any information of value; but as long as there's any chance in it at all, I suppose it's worth trying for. He might remember what business my father transacted last, or who it was with, or if he carried many papers with him. Some 'niggers' took considerable observation about such things. I think Zeb was of that sort."

This was the substance of his meditation during the whole of his journey. It was a tedious ride for something more than a hundred miles on the "main line," and then a change to a "branch" that ran somewhere into the coal and iron regions. The coaches of this train were shabby, the track rough and badly ballasted, and the speed attempted was not of a dizzy rate.

After a couple of hours of this depressing travel Estill arrived at Rose Valley. He looked around with wonder and disgust when he alighted at the

"depot." The landscape was wild without having any of the charm of a wilderness. There seemed to be neither forest nor clearing, mountains nor valley, but a sort of unwilling, disagreeable compromise between them all. There was neither the air of tranquillity peculiar to wooded hills and shady glens, nor the friendly gleams of civilization. There was neither the sight nor the presence of roses. The "depot" was of the simplest kind. It consisted of a battered freight-car, deposed from its trucks, and resting upon unsteady-looking spiles. It was painted a most saddening reddish-brown color, and was in the keeping of an "agent" who was humpbacked and cadaverous. He had a hollow cough, and from his appearance might have been a life-long victim to rheumatism and malaria.

There were a few loafers, and a dozen miserable houses scattered around; and across the track, a short distance up the hill, stood the settlement "store." This emporium of commerce was not imposing to the view. It was a small frame building, weather-stained, in bad repair, and above the door there was a faded and crooked sign which bore the paradoxical inscription—"Prosperty Jelks, Cheep Store."

Howard made an inquiry of the station agent about his "nigger," and after that functionary had finished a spell of coughing, he solemnly professed his ignorance of any such person; and

suggested that Mr. Estill had better sound the proprietor of the store.

Mr. Jelks was discovered sitting outside of his trade-palace upon an empty oil-barrel, exposing himself to the enervating shine of the bright June sun. He wasn't the least bit flurried or embarrassed when Howard approached. He looked instead so calm and imperturbable that he reminded Estill of some absurd old monk of the Stylite order lost in fanatical meditations on his solitary tower.

"Business rather slack to-day, eh?" asked Howard lightly.

"'Bout'n average," replied Mr. Jelks, with a liberal expectoration of tobacco juice. "'Tan't mor'n I kin take keer of."

"I didn't imagine you needed any help," said Howard. "Is it like this the year round?"

"When 'tan't no wus," grunted Mr. Jelks.

"You seem to be pretty well satisfied with it, anyway. Judging from your sign, up there, a stranger might imagine that you were in the midst of an era of unusual success."

"That 'ere sign is out o' date an' misleadin'," explained Mr. Jelks regretfully; "I put that up at the start, reckonin' on how I'd been prosperous afore. I kep' tavern in Ohiah afore I kem here."

"Did you make money there?"

"Did I? Well my young feller, I fetched thir-

teen hundred dollars, clean cash, not countin' a cow'n two dogs, when I kem here."

"How long did you keep tavern in Ohio?"

"Fifteen year."

"You must have struck a soft, remunerative snap there," remarked Howard seriously. "And you've been somewhat disappointed here?"

"'Tan't jest what I looked fer, but I've been expectin' right along that business 'd pick up." At this point the conversation was interrupted by a woman who came and bought a paper of pins; followed by a darky who invested in a five-cent cut of Virginia twist, and tried to get it "charged," but could not.

This customer was no sooner out of the way than there came ambling lazily along a ragged, crooked-formed man, with a loose bundle of half a dozen well-grown rattlesnakes—dead, to be sure—slung carelessly over his shoulder. He was a forlorn, lank, dowdy man, and, like the lugubrious station-agent, seemed to have a broken constitution. He dropped his burden on the steps, and opened negotiations with Mr. Jelks. The merchant looked them over critically, counted their rattles, and finally remarked that they "seemed to be putty fat ones."

"Well, how much kin yer give fer the lot?" drawled the dowdy man.

"Kaint go more'n six bits—in trade," replied Mr. Jelks, discouragingly.

The customer took his pay in fish-hooks and plug-tobacco, and after Mr. Jelks had served him, the merchant picked up the interesting bundle of reptiles, and dumped them into a corner of his storeroom.

"'Taint' quite safe ter leave 'em where people might step on 'em with bare feet," as if to explain his wise precaution. "Thet might happen jest as bad as bein' bit by one of 'em—a steppin' onter them fangs."

"What on earth did you buy them for?" inquired Estill, shuddering with the contemplation; "people over here don't eat such game, do they?"

"No—kain't say as they do," replied Jelks slowly, as if he were not quite positive on that point. "Least I doan't buy 'em fer thet. I git them for ther ile. The ole woman knows how ter extract it better'n I do. It's mighty good for ear-ache, the ile uv them things is, 'n wuth bout two dollars 'n ounce. It's also good for rheumatiz, some sez. Ruther a nice job a-gittin it out though, 'n they doan't yield much till they git old."

"These seem to be fresh caught," Estill remarked. "Upon my word, some of their tails are twitching yet!"

"Yes, they alluz does till sundown," explained Jelks; "one of them critters never goes clean dead till sundown, even if it's killed airly in the mornin'—it's ther natur." Mr. Jelks insisted that his

personal knowledge substantiated this peculiarity in snakeology; and then, remarking that business *was* picking up, resumed his position on the barrel. After Howard had amused himself for a few minutes by conversing with Mr. Jelks upon finance (having discovered that he was an ardent greenbacker), he changed the subject to the negro Zeb. The store-keeper remembered him quite well. He had had commercial transactions with him. So far as he recollected such business relations had been satisfactory. But Zeb lived about six miles away back in the country. Mr. Jelks did not know the exact spot, but the colored citizen who had invested in a nickel's worth of tobacco at his counter did know, and he was forthwith called up from his loafing-place at the "depot."

Mr. Jelks had a horse and wagon, both of somewhat archaic pattern, and Estill engaged the negro to drive him to Zeb's plantation. It was a rocky road part of the way, and the remainder was so full of ruts and holes that the expedition was in constant danger of being wrecked.

Finally the driver announced that they were nearing Zeb's farm. It was a most lonely, dreary place. On one side of the ragged road was a scrawny copse; on the other, a small field, grown up to weeds. Rank mullein stalks crowded the dog-fennel, while here and there a few misguided stalks of corn, sprung from leavings of last year's crop, had made a sickly attempt to grow, but had

been contaminated and smothered, and looked yellowish and puny. Back from the road some distance there stood a dilapidated house.

"Poor Zeb doesn't appear to be very prosperous," mused Howard, as they drove up the narrow lane, the weary horse nipping at the tall weeds by the way. Beyond the mansion of logs and clapboards was a row of tall, scraggy Lombardy poplar trees, their solitary appearance made doubly so by two or three dead ones standing in the line. There is something emblematic of lonesomeness in a Lombardy poplar, at its best, but here—these seemed closely associated with the spirit of Horror! When they reached the yard an ugly spotted snake squirmed across the path, and a half-starved rat scampered from the doorsteps.

"Guess dar an't nobody to home," said the darky, when they found the house closed up and forsaken.

"There has not been for months," exclaimed Howard in disgust; "the place has been vacant and neglected for a long time."

"'Spect Zeb done gone moved 'way," replied the negro, as if still half in doubt. And after thinking very hard for a minute, and rubbing his woolly head all over, in characteristic fashion, his face lit up with the light of memory, and he exclaimed: "Law sakes, I rec'lect now—dat niggah

Zeb done moved to Kansas las' yeah, fuh shuah, yah yah!"

Howard felt that words would be unequal to the situation, but when the grinning darky saw the expression of his face he suddenly desisted from his hilarity, and his voice was that of meekness.

Dusty, and tired, and disgusted, Estill got back to the station in time to catch the return train; and as he moved away he glanced from the window of the car, and saw Mr. Jelks seated on his barrel, apparently meditating upon the flood-tide of his ancient prosperity.

The train on the main line was a trifle behind time, and it was quite late when he reached Ayresboro, so he did not see anybody till the following morning at breakfast. He was rested by that time, and his bath had put him in a good humor, so that he began to be greatly amused at his experiences of the day before. Isn't it odd that so many of the most amusing incidents of our lives, are funny only after they are passed and done with!

Howard entertained Florence and Mrs. Ordlaw at length with his graphic account of the trip, and with his powers of mimicry gave an exhibition that afforded the invalid girl great merriment. All his disappointment was hidden from her. What a joyous, lighthearted boy she thought he was—always ready with a story or a bit of drollery to put her in good spirits.

Even her mirth had something pathetic in it for Howard; for it always impressed him with a thought of how very happy she might have been but for her misfortune, and how her innocent mind seemed scarcely to realize the privations she suffered. One so appreciative and grateful of heart would have found so much in life to enjoy, so many things to have prized.

"It almost makes me feel rebellious," he remarked to Mrs. Ordlaw, "when I contemplate that the pleasures of life that human creatures court the most—balls, dancing, theatres, the opera, the admiration and envy of others—must be forever denied to her! And her uncomplaining resignation—that's what makes it seem all the more cruel."

"It may appear so to our imperfect vision," replied Mrs. Ordlaw, consolingly. "But you know we must accept everything as for the best and not question——"

"Oh, teach that to your children, but spare me," Howard rejoined impatiently. "My experience with the world has unfitted me for any such pious nonsense. Things go for the worse in a majority of instances, and that is *not* for the best. However, I don't wish to shock you, my good aunt; I know your orthodox convictions."

"That's considerate of you," replied Mrs. Ordlaw quietly; "but let me ask of you, Howard, which doctrine you would rather teach to your

innocent, helpless sister; mine which gives me peace and hope, or yours which makes you resentful?"

"Neither," replied Howard, promptly. "Mine is not a doctrine at all; I only refuse to pin my faith to a beneficence which there is every reason to believe does not exist. I could not imagine any greater arrogance than to tell my sister that I think it entirely for the best that I am strong and capable of all worldly enjoyment, and that she is to be a suffering invalid for life! It is not necessary to ask her to believe that. I can make her happier with my sympathy, and love, and kindness. But I prefer to believe that humanity would be very much better without misery, and crime, and poverty, and pain—*they* are *not* for the best."

"But if it should lead ultimately to perfection and supreme happiness, would not you then be able to see the wisdom of the great Power who guided us through these trials that we might be the better fitted for a higher state?"

"Would even that be the best possible?" asked Howard, seriously. "Could not the Power which you revere as supreme, if He were able to plan and carry to perfection such a scheme, have arrived at perfection by a shorter way? And if that shorter way had avoided all the horrors—too dark and intense to contemplate—that our race has suffered, would not that have been better?

Oh, you say we would not have appreciated it so much without this? But let me say—Perfect goodness is not relative; past conditions can have no effect upon it whatever—the idea of perfectness precludes that entirely. I am not any happier because my remote ancestors lived in caves and fought with wild animals for existence. I would much rather not have had such ancestors. I would rather they had lived in good houses and fared comfortably from the beginning. Honesty and virtue are good in themselves; not because there is also licentiousness and cruelty. Civilization is blessed and admirable, but not any the more so, intrinsically, because the world was once in darkness, and men were continually destroying each other. Christianity is a good religion, but not any the better because men have been tortured to death by tens of thousands in its name. It would have been better——"

Mrs. Ordlaw was a devout Baptist, in good standing, and to her such heresy, expounded by one whom she loved and honored as much as she did Howard Estill, distressed her sorely. Howard suddenly discovered that her face was sad, and that tears were glistening in her eyes. "Why, what's the matter, auntie?" he asked sympathetically.

"It sounds so wicked to hear you talk so," auntie replied; "it would be so much better for you if you had more faith."

Estill was at first prompted to reply that devout faith in something he could not possibly know anything about seemed to him but a kind of superstition; but seeing that to prolong the controversy would cause pain without establishing the rationality of his convictions, he broke it off.

"I wouldn't have you think me blasphemous, Aunt Sara—not for anything. I simply deplore everything that is painful and evil, and wish it were better. That's all. Hope it all will be better some time. Come, now don't tell Florence that I have been complaining."

"You see, you acknowledged yourself that to undermine her faith a particle she would be less happy."

"Well, ahem! I don't wish to meddle with either her faith or yours. No, if it's any consolation, stick to it, both of you. It won't do you any harm, at least." And he went away saying to himself, "Reason is at a great disadvantage in cases like this."

As he soliloquized, he took his way to the Snowflake. The inn looked somewhat cheerless externally to-day, for the weather had turned rather cloudy and cold, as the weather frequently does in June (audacious as it seems to be), and the guests were hovering indoors, wishing that there was a little fire somewhere to get near; which there was not. One of them intimated to

Major Derryberry that grate-fires would not be unpleasant.

"What," exclaimed the major, "fires at this date in a summer hotel named the Snowflake! Oh, no, that would be inconsistent; and if there's one jewel, gentlemen, that I prize above another, it is consistency. Here, whist!—boy, bring me my overcoat. There's every indication that it will be warmer to-morrow." The next week the thermometer registered 95 degrees of heat; and the complaining guests remarked that "Snowflake" was a very inopportune name at both extremes.

"Hello, old chappie," chirruped Floyd, accosting Howard in the lobby; "Uncle Wat is here and was asking about you."

"Asking about me? Why, how does he know anything about me—he never saw me?"

"Well, I think we may have said something to him about you—in fact, I believe we did mention you first."

"We did, eh? Who is *we*?"

"Why, ah, I think cousin Olive was present, when we spoke of you. I think she was. Don't remember what she said. May not have said much. Think I asked Uncle Wat if he knew you."

"I hope you didn't broach the scheme you had——"

"Oh, no, nothing of the sort, dear fellow. Wouldn't have done it against your wishes, you

know. But, really, Uncle Wat seemed to know something about you,—asked immediately if you were from the South, and how long you had been in New York,—said the name was familiar to him. And of course I gave you a great send-off. The scheme's a winner, old chap. Uncle Wat's dead sure to take a liking to you, and it will be the making of you."

All this did not make much impression on Howard's mind. He regarded it more as a whim of Floyd's, one which grew out of the goodness of his heart, but which was not likely to have any serious effect upon so great a financier as Mr. Kirkwood was represented to be.

While Floyd was still talking, Estill observed an elderly gentleman, with the bearing and manner of one who has achieved success and is pretty well satisfied with the performance, walk briskly up to the cigar stand and light a cigar. He was faultlessly dressed for the time and place, his hair was white and wavy, and his heavy, gray mustaches were carefully curled at the ends. He was a man to attract attention anywhere.

"Ah, ha, here's Uncle Wat," exclaimed Floyd, suddenly catching sight of the distinguished-appearing man; and he immediately took Howard to him and made the two acquainted.

"Estill, Estill," said Mr. Kirkwood, meditatively, when Floyd first mentioned Howard to him, the day before.

"Yes, you must know him, he's got a reputation—made it with his brains—got lots of 'em. Of the order of geniuses—elegant fellow, too, uncle; a devilish nice fellow, with plenty of style, too. He ought to have ten thousand a year."

"He ought to get it, too, if he has a good stock of brains," answered Mr. Kirkwood.

"Yes, and no doubt he will, when he gets the right start. Don't think he has struck his winning gait yet. But he will, and he's going to make a valuable aid for some great man—one like you, for instance, Uncle Wat."

Uncle Wat grunted, snapped his eyes, and puffed at his cigar. "So you think he has rare ability, eh?" he asked.

"I'm entirely convinced of it," continued Floyd enthusiastically, "and for versatility, why, he hasn't his equal in the club. He's a remarkable fellow, can do anything! Don't make any difference whether it's carve a turkey, write a sonnet, or tie a neck-scarf, he has the skill and taste of a born artist. I tell you, he's a remarkable man."

Mr. Kirkwood suddenly ceased blowing away a mouthful of smoke, and looked at his eloquent nephew with a comical expression of incredulity. "He must be a wonder," he remarked ironically, after a moment. "But do you think these remarkable abilities would help him any in building a railroad, or foreclosing a mortgage?"

Mr. Claycourt did not argue that they would,

but he insisted that Mr. Estill was a remarkable person, as nearly all his intimates *were* remarkable persons in one way or another, whenever he spoke of them. And of course he left the impression upon Mr. Kirkwood's mind that the young man Estill was a good deal of a swell, and in considerable need of the wherewithal to support himself.

So when Claycourt introduced him he was favorably surprised. He was a good deal the style of man that Mr. Kirkwood liked to see. He might be fastidious, but he was not foppish. Kirkwood eyed him keenly for a minute, and said to himself, "There doesn't seem to be much nonsense about this fellow. Perhaps the boy was half right."

While the three were talking pleasantly there came a bell-boy to Mr. Kirkwood and informed him that Mrs. Kirkwood was much worse, and that his presence was required at once.

"Very well," replied Mr. Kirkwood passively; "tell Hopson I'll be there as soon as I finish my cigar," after which he went on talking and smoking.

"I suppose he's used to these sudden changes for the worse," thought Estill, after his first surprise. "At least, it doesn't seem to alarm him much. I wonder how amicable their family relations are, anyway?"

After Mr. Kirkwood left them Howard and

Floyd talked for awhile with the major, and before leaving the hotel Estill requested to know if Mrs. Kirkwood's relapse was really serious. "Wait a minute and I'll see," replied Floyd. "I won't ask—that's unreliable; I'll just take a look."

Within three minutes Floyd returned smiling. "She's getting ready for the cotillion party Friday night," he reported. "You'll see her in all her glory, my boy. I'm always proud of her on such occasions. She's truly a remarkable woman!"

CHAPTER V.

THE IDLERS OF AYRESBORO.

As soon as Estill was gone Claycourt and Major Derryberry fell to discussing him in a truly friendly fashion. "What is there about this inheritance I have heard him speak of?" asked Floyd. "He told me something of it the other day, when a greedy-looking lawyer came to volunteer his services in the case; but I didn't fully comprehend how his loss came about."

"I don't know to a certainty," said the major deliberately; "but I make it out that the real facts are not specially flattering to Estill's pride. You see, his father was a thrifty sort of man, and looking considerably ahead he saw that the war, when it came, would be likely to prove a disastrous one to property. So I imagine that he either took his gold, into which he had converted most of his assets, and buried it, or gave it up to some friend out of the country for safe keeping. In either case, the old gentleman being dead, and nothing left to show what he did, it's a very uncertain thing to hunt for. Howard was full of patriotism, and hasn't liked to admit that his father would resort to such a scheme rather than

devote his fortune to the cause of his country. But of course a thoroughly practical mind is likely to look at it differently."

"It's too bad that he started in after it the wrong way," remarked Floyd.

"He was in too much of a hurry, or probably had bad advice. And from what he tells me, it's pretty plain to my mind that the lawyer he employed sold him out. He always was regarded an unscrupulous fellow, that Sticey was; but sharp; yes, sir, I'll allow he was sharp."

"And you don't think there's much show for Howard?"

"Can't see that there is. But, of course, something might turn up. Things do turn up oddly sometimes, you know."

"Sticey will be out of Sing Sing before long,' suggested Floyd, "and might be ready to sell the other chap out next time, eh?"

"Very likely, if Howard had money enough to bid against the other chap. Probably that's about what he would have to do, if he entered into negotiations with Mr. Sticey."

Floyd pondered seriously. He seemed for a moment to be exercising his mental faculties to an unusual extent. "It doesn't look encouraging," he remarked finally; "think if I were Estill I'd be looking up a fortune from some other source. That's been my advice to him."

The weather soon became quite warm again,

and the guests at the Snowflake took to the verandas and wide grounds with increased gratification. It was about sunset when Estill walked leisurely up the broad steps and found Olive Kirkwood sitting dreamily alone.

"I am almost surprised to see you coming," she said to him. "But then I presume you didn't know that I was here."

"I see you can be ironical. Well, irony can be cultivated like any other quality," responded Estill with a composure that was calculated to be exasperating.

"I meant to indicate that I think you have been quite indifferent. I supposed we would see you often."

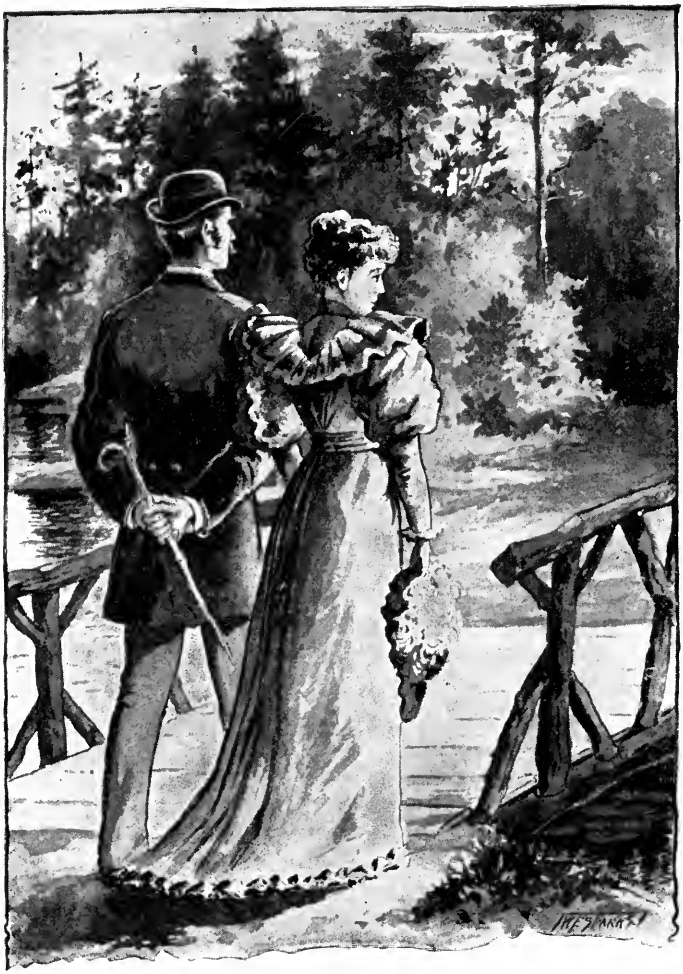
"I have been here quite frequently. Mr. Claycourt can answer for that."

"Yes, you seem to direct your attention all to him and the Major. You always seem to be talking with them. Apparently quite oblivious to the presence of anyone else here."

"I am very sorry if I have appeared careless in that respect. I assure you that I have not intended it. You see, I was absent one day, and everybody has been driven indoors by the cold weather."

"Yes, it has been very tedious," complained Olive.

"I should not have supposed that life ever was tedious to you," replied Estill, as they walked



"I SHOULD NOT HAVE SUPPOSED THAT LIFE EVER WAS TEDIOUS TO YOU," REPLIED ESTILL, AS THEY WALKED DOWN THE PATH THAT LED THROUGH THE SHADED GROUNDS TO THE BROOK AND THE WOOD BEYOND. *Page 77*

down the path that led through the shaded grounds to the brook and the wood beyond. It was a very pleasant walk, especially after one (or two) got away from the grounds immediately about the inn, where there were usually some idlers; and crossed on the rustic bridge into the quiet glen. It was all beautiful and delightful—the hour, the situation, the scene. Twilight, a wealth of foliage, and seclusion from the ever curious world. Besides all that, there was Olive Kirkwood, lovely, sympathetic, confiding; the glances of whose brown eyes were even more eloquent than her pretty words. And if Howard Estill was not supremely happy with all this enchantment, (as he was not,) it is only an unpleasant illustration of how perverse and unreasonable the human heart can be. Without debating the case with his soul, Howard felt that he was in immediate danger of allowing himself to be unduly influenced. After thinking it over in a very philosophical way he had concluded that, all things considered, it would be an unwise thing for him to fall in love with Miss Kirkwood. Having reached that ground the next conclusion was that he would not. And having thus determined upon what he believed to be most advisable, it was not a source of the utmost satisfaction to feel that his determination had very little to do with it, and that he was likely to prove much less master of himself than he had supposed.

"I don't believe I ought to complain of it ever being really so," Olive answered; "but you can't believe that some hours are not more anxious and wearisome than others?"

"No—that would exhibit a very imperfect knowledge of life in general. But I should suppose that one in your position, with all your advantages, and hopes, and attractions"—Howard stopped short, leaving his sentence unfinished, and seemed to have forgotten just what he was going to say—which, however, could scarcely have been attributed to a lack of interest in the subject. "I don't see why you should be unhappy," he continued, taking up the thread of his argument (which was in danger of becoming badly ravelled) after an awkward pause, and clipping it off shortly.

"Oh, I don't dream of being so *now*," she replied somewhat impulsively. After which there was another pause.

"Cousin Floyd tells me that you have known a great many hardships," she said presently. Howard answered, yes. "And that you have seen a great deal of trouble, too," she continued. Howard answered with another monosyllable, and Olive sighed sympathetically. "You must be very thankful to think that they are all over," she remarked consolingly.

Howard smiled half grimly. "How do you know that they are all over?"

"Oh, I mean those that are past, of course."

"I didn't know but you might be able to offer a policy of insurance against any more happening to me," he said.

"I wish I could," she replied, not noticing the tinge of sarcasm in his remark.

"That's really very good of you, and I'm more thankful for that," he answered somewhat more tenderly. "As a rule, I'm not cultivating thankfulness, not having much to be thankful for, and a great deal more to deplore. You look surprised. Pray don't be shocked at my seeming irreverence —I don't wish to appear wicked. There—if we keep on in this serious vein we shall grow melancholy. Do you hear that whippoorwill?"

"Yes. But I'm in no danger of being melancholy, and I really like to be serious, once in a while. I hope you don't think that I'm incapable of it?"

"No. I see that you are also capable of distinguishing a difference between being serious and being sad. Some very young persons seem to know no medium between nonsense and solemnity."

"I shouldn't think anyone would venture to be flippant with you."

"With me—why, am I such a forbidding creature in appearance? I presume it must be that because I have had unusually sad experience, for

a young man, those who know of it think I am in a funereal mood continually."

"Well, not so bad as that," Olive replied; "but it must be admitted that you look rather lofty and severe sometimes."

"Indeed? Well, ah, thanks; I shall try to cultivate a more pleasing expression—with your aid."

"You are beginning beautifully."

"Under such tuition I shall grow perfectly charming."

"I never suspected that I could wield such magical influence. Ha, ha," she laughed, "I thought we were going to be serious with each other."

"I am entirely sincere," said Howard.

"Were you, really?" she asked, with a look of pleasant reassurance. Well, then—so was I."

They walked a little nearer together, after having established this confidential relation, silently for a while, as if the new-found satisfaction were dearer unexpressed in words. But what had been said was enough to last only a few minutes.

"You seem so different, the better one comes to know you," remarked Olive, speaking first, of course.

"Isn't it so with every one you know well?" Estill asked carelessly, instead of speaking what he felt.

"Perhaps so, if I take enough interest in every one to observe it—which I don't."

"It's kind of you to make an exception of me," he answered, in a voice that implied a great sacrifice on her part.

"Not a kindness, only something that is irresistable," she said, looking up into his face with something so tender in her beautiful eyes that Estill half doubted for an instant if it could really be meant for him. "It is what my heart has yearned for, and yet is sorry to receive," he thought, but was unresponsive enough to give her no answer, except that which was spoken in his glance. "I havn't said much to encourage it," thought Estill, continuing his mental soliloquy; "she hasn't said much, either; neither of us has said much. I've talked more than this sometimes when flirting in a ball-room. It must be somewhat different." The last with a mental sigh.

There was nothing to marvel at. Of course, the insignificant conversation had very little to do with it. Words seldom have very much to do with it—at first. They are usually irrevelant, or used to mask the feelings. It is the indefinable sympathy between soul and soul, most truly and naturally expressed in a look.

As they retraced their steps and neared the hotel they were joined by Mr. Blake Harrell, who seemed to take it as a matter of course that his

presence was much desired. "This straying away for a whole hour and leaving a fellow to mope around all alone, as I've been doing, is deuced unkind," said Mr. Harrell to Olive, in the most confident and familiar way.

"How wonderfully plaintive you are," she answered quite as easily; "almost pathetic."

"Sufficient cause—I'm not used to being neglected," Mr. Harrell remarked.

"He has the nerve of impudence," thought Estill, "or else they are—" A sharp twang of jealousy came with this alternative. It had not occurred to him before why this fellow Harrell was on such terms of familiarity with the Kirkwood family; probably because he had given him very little consideration of any kind. Estill felt in an instant, after this reflection, that Harrell was just the sort of man he could heartily dislike without any effort whatever.

"Oh, you can't induce me to waste any sympathy upon you," Olive replied. "Where is mamma? I presumed that she would occupy most of your time here. Besides I must have a little diversion sometimes, and Mr. Estill has been kind enough to give me almost my first opportunity."

"Ha, ha, I presume Mr. Estill is quite willing to shoulder the responsibility," laughed Mr. Harrell. "Nevertheless, I fear your mamma would not thank you to impose my attention upon her constantly."

"Ah, he must be Mrs. Kirkwood's physician," thought Estill. "Of course, he's the doctor. That puts another phase upon it. What sleek rogues doctors grow to be!"

Upon reaching the inn they found Mrs. Kirkwood the centre of a merry little party, looking unusually bright and interesting.

"Pray don't be interrupted by our intrusion," remarked Mr. Harrell, taking upon himself lightly to apologize for the trio.

"We were just discussing our cotillion party, and of course you were not here when we needed your suggestions," complained Mrs. Kirkwood in a very sweet and effective manner.

"A thousand pardons, madam. I am unfortunate. Perhaps it's not too late—"

"Yes, it's always too late when one has committed an error. And of course one never needs to apologize unless he has erred," Mrs. Kirkwood interrupted him to say. And added listlessly, as if very well satisfied with her effort at logic—"Sit over here, Blake; you obstruct my view of the lawn."

Having been convicted of a misdemeanor, Mr. Harrell promptly did as he was bid, and for a moment affected to be exceedingly meek.

"Oh, come, Aunt, don't crush Harrell too flat—somebody only wondered if he would prefer a german," put in Floyd Claycourt, who had accomplished a record of keeping silent several minutes.

"Floyd, Floyd," exclaimed Mrs. Kirkwood languidly, "why will you persist in being so absurd! Pray don't take any note of his remarks, ladies—he's a hopeless case." After which Floyd smiled upon his beautiful auntie very sweetly, as if in gratitude for being let off so easily.

"It seems so strange that some people should talk so much to so little effect," continued Mrs. Kirkwood amiably, "and say so many absurd things, especially men."

"Men have to regulate their conversations to the capacity of their auditors," explained Mr. Harrell with much suavity of manner; "and when they talk with women—"

"You ungallant wretch," exclaimed Mrs. Kirkwood, interrupting him; "this example quite proves the truth of my remark, ladies; what can be so utterly unreasonable as a man?"

"Woman," promptly replied Claycourt, as if he had been asleep during the previous exchanges of compliments, and had woke up just in time to accommodate his aunt by answering her last question.

The expression of commiseration and contempt that immediately appeared upon Mrs. Kirkwood's face was worthy of a greater provocation—of a more daring violation of truth. It would have been truly withering if bestowed upon any person other than her audacious nephew. He, happily, had become hardened in the peculiar wickedness

of disturbing her complacency, and invulnerable to the pungency of her rebukes.

"I have already apologized for Mr. Claycourt's ridiculous behavior, ladies, but you see he seems to have no sense of humiliation. Floyd, I am mortified at your lack of wit. Mr. Harrell, haven't you observed that I dropped my smelling salts?" And regaining her nose-tonic, Mrs. Kirkwood settled back in her white, fluffy wrap with the air of a grand duchess. Those of the company who knew her but slightly were quite impressed with her hauteur. Those who knew her well smiled unto themselves.

"We seem to be forgetting the cotillion party," Miss Olive remarked after there had been a moment's quiet. "I hope our friends will arrive from Washington in time for it."

"They will think we are a very prosy party in a very dull, uninteresting place," put in Mrs. Kirkwood. "What can one mean who is not an invalid by coming to such a nook? It is very depressing when one thinks of Newport and Saratoga." Then everybody talked enthusiastically about the life, and society, and style of those resorts, and the brilliant parties of a number of other noted places, in the true summer-resort manner; every other place being pictured as incomparably more interesting and desirable than the one they were at.

It began to grow dusk, and Mrs. Kirkwood

felt the moisture in the evening air. At first there was a slight cough, which Harrell was quick to notice.

"Better have a heavier wrap," he suggested. "You are likely to catch cold—"

"Pray don't mention any more horrible things that are likely to happen to me," replied Mrs. Kirkwood ungratefully; "you are as bad as Hopson, and I believe that she really tries to frighten me to death. Why are people continually prophesying such dismal things for me! It *is* growing cooler, I imagine. Hopson!"

Hopson, the stout English woman, was usually within easy call, but at this moment happened to be farther away.

"Do summon Hopson, Floyd," commanded Mrs. Kirkwood pettishly. "It is shameful the way that creature neglects me. I suppose she will leave me to perish sometime. I don't believe you sympathize with me a bit, you wretch, smiling so fiendishly"—this to Harrell, who was looking amused. "I suppose both of you could see me die in agony without being the least bit disturbed. Here, Hopson, I've been calling you for an age—my cough-lozenges! And take the cushions—if I stay here any longer I shall die of neuralgia—Blake, what *can* you be talking so confidentially about with Olive? Mr. Estill, don't let them ignore you entirely. Really you have remained

wonderfully silent since you sat here. I hope you are not a dreamer. I hate dreamy people."

"Indeed, I am anything but that. But at times, you know, madam, one finds himself so highly entertained by the conversation of others that he prefers to listen rather than say much himself—"

Mrs. Kirkwood graciously accepted Howard's ambiguous explanation as a compliment, not detecting the irony that prompted it. He had been listening to just the kind of drivel that he felt the greatest contempt for, and, as Mrs. Kirkwood talked in her whimsical, exasperating manner, had wondered how Olive could have been reared under such influence and still possess her gentleness of disposition and sincerity of heart.

"Auntie is perfectly charming, to-night," remarked Floyd enthusiastically, after Mrs. Kirkwood had expressed her opinion of Mr. Estill's superior wisdom. "Really, my dear Aunt, I haven't seen you so vivacious for weeks."

"My dear Floyd, it consoles me to see that you are capable of observation at times," she replied patronizingly.

"You really don't know how perfectly happy I am when you appear so well, dear Aunt. That's right, go in out of this dew-laden atmosphere."

Mrs. Kirkwood affected to ignore Floyd's last words entirely; Harrell offered her his arm and escorted her indoors. When she was gone Floyd began to whistle. Olive talked a few minutes

with Estill, and also went in. Then both he and Floyd lighted cigars.

"Ever see a woman just like that aunt of mine?" asked Claycourt.

"Honor bright—no," Estill replied.

"She's a precious one," continued Claycourt, now putting both feet up carelessly over the railing; "told you before that she was remarkable."

"She is," assented Estill.

"Oh, this is nothing. "You haven't been half surprised yet. She's a genius in the way of surprises. For a long time I was in constant surprise that she kept alive. I think I should be surprised now if she should die."

"Must have had a good constitution to begin with."

"Not that I ever heard of."

"Good attendance is everything. Harrell, I have no doubt is quite efficient."

"In what?"

"As a physician."

"Physician be blowed! He doesn't know a Sedlitz powder from a gin fizz."

"I didn't know," said Estill, laconically.

"Of course not. You had to account for him some way. He's just accidental—just took a fancy to my aunt for some reason, and hasn't anything to do but humor her whims. Long-time friend, you see."

"Ah," said Estill; and then both smoked in silence.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCERNING INFATUATIONS AND DIVINATIONS.

ESTILL smoked and meditated a great deal during the remainder of the evening. When such moods came upon him he was taciturn, and Mr. Claycourt remarked more than once that his friend was not half sociable.

The Kirkwood family was perplexing Howard not a little. He flattered himself on being able to discern the real character and motives of people about as quickly as most men of his years, but in this instance there appeared unusual contradictions. Here was a family of three members, each one of whom seemed to have entirely different temperaments and characteristics from the others. He could not keep Olive out of his mind, and she kept the father and mother continually in view. He wished Mrs. Kirkwood were different. He hated insincerity; and she was a perfect type of it. Her affectation took a form of tyranny. And Olive was so bewitching!

Estill retired feeling dissatisfied. He was aware of an attraction that was going to be difficult for him to withstand. He wished he hadn't come with Claycourt—or that he had kept away from

the inn—or that Olive had ignored him. That would not have been agreeable, to be sure, but he wouldn't have thought about it long.

The next morning he spent with Florence, and in the happiness of her society forgot somewhat of his perplexity. Whether he had succeeded or not, he endeavored never to appear dispirited or distressed in her presence.

In the afternoon he started as usual for a stroll. It seemed the most natural thing in the world for him to reach the inn very soon, and to find Miss Kirkwood.

"I did not see you all the morning," she said.

"Why, no. I must not allow myself to spend too much time here. You know I am visiting my invalid sister, and not seeking diversion at a summer resort."

Olive did not reply, but looked disappointed, hurt, as if he had administered a sharp rebuke. Howard immediately felt a twinge of conscience for having spoken so abruptly, and did not lose much time in trying to make his remark appear justifiable.

"I fear you scarcely realize my actual position, Miss Kirkwood," he said; "I am not a man of much leisure. My circumstances do not warrant it. What I have I should by rights devote to my sister. She is most unfortunate. I would be an unworthy fellow if I did not try to make her life as cheerful as possible. She has never known

pleasure as you have—think of being confined to an invalid's chair all one's life! When I come down here and find her so helpless and pale, I censure myself for ever allowing my heart to be gay."

"Do you think she would wish you to feel that way?"

"No, she is the soul of resignation and unselfishness."

"And, I am sure, exceedingly fond of you. You promised to take me to see her."

"Yes, sometime when you wish it."

"I wish it now—would like to go this afternoon."

"Then you shall—come."

Olive appeared exceedingly happy as she walked down the lane with Howard toward Mrs. Ordlaw's cottage, and Florence was pleased as well as surprised to see them coming.

"I have brought Miss Kirkwood to see you, deary," said Howard in a cheerful manner when they came up to her; "she was good enough to want to come." Olive sat down, quite close to the invalid after the simple introduction, and Howard was quick to observe that they appeared to be entirely congenial and to understand each other perfectly.

"After your brother had told me about you I could hardly wait to call on you," Olive said; "I think you are fortunate in having a big brother

who talks so beautifully about you. I almost felt acquainted with you before I came."

"Oh, you can't imagine what a good big brother he is," replied Florence; "life would be very bleak without him."

"Yes, I can," responded Olive so quickly that she felt abashed at her candor. "Anyway, I think I can, though I never had a brother myself."

"I don't suppose any one else ever had one quite like mine," said Olive.

"A—hem!" interrupted Mr. Estill, fidgeting about uneasily; "if this eulogy is to continue I think it would be good form for me to go somewhere and take a smoke."

"No, no," objected both. Florence declared that it was not half as much as she felt like saying, and Olive thought he really ought to be delighted to stay and hear it.

"Ah, isn't this a picturesque spot, Miss Kirkwood," asked Howard, shifting the subject suddenly.

"A most charming spot. What a magnificent view in that direction—miles and miles! And beautiful hills nearer off this way, and the village nestling close by—indeed, I should never grow weary of it. It must grow dearer to you every day, dear Miss Estill."

"Oh, but you should remember that it is not always summer, and the hills are not always clothed with green, and we can not always sit out

here in the warmth of June—and in winter it sometimes looks pretty bleak, especially if the winters are unusually long."

"I suppose it must be quite different to you then," said Olive with much sympathy in her voice. And she silently wondered how the poor girl could endure to be shut up in such a secluded place all winter without the resources of society and amusements.

"Yet we often have very good times," continued Florence, as if guessing what had passed in Olive's mind; "little Rilly is always ready for some game that is sure to interest us both, and it is sometimes wonderful how quickly the time passes. Then my dear friend Bessie—you haven't seen Bessie Medlock yet?"

"No; tell me about her."

"Oh, she's ever so good, and growing so pretty, too, isn't she, Howard?"

"Perfectly lovely," assented Howard.

"And so sweet-tempered—"

"Like an angel in that respect," continued Mr. Estill in his corroborative testimony.

"I hope she will come while you are here—but of course you would have to know her some time to find out how really admirable she is," said Florence, observing a changed expression on Miss Kirkwood's face, which seemed to say that she was incredulous, or losing interest in the subject.

It did not escape Howard, either. Perhaps he had been watching for it.

"Bless my heart, she took it just as I feared," he said to himself. "Now, why should she care whether I'm interested in Bessie Medlock or not? A–hem—and why should I have cared a cent last night whether she was interested in Harrel or not?—ah, me, we're all queer creatures, and pretty much alike!"

"You should ask Floyd about Miss Medlock," continued Florence, "I am sure he would speak well for her—it's odd that he should get acquainted with her before you."

"Yes, I've no doubt Floyd would give you a very glowing account of her," said Howard, ready to change the current of Olive's suspicion. "He seems to be very much smitten—accidental meeting, you see—romance, and that sort of thing," he explained carelessly.

"Oh, indeed, do tell me," exclaimed Miss Kirkwood, suddenly brightening up with increased curiosity; "I wouldn't miss anything like that for the world! And my rogue of a cousin hasn't mentioned a word of it."

Before Florence had finished relating the story, Bessie and Rilly appeared, coming up the walk; and in a few minutes more Bessie was telling it over again in her own simple manner, as if there had not been the least bit of design in Mr. Claycourt's actions.

"Now isn't that just like Floyd," said Olive; "he wouldn't be happy if he wasn't up to something of that kind."

"But it really wasn't his fault," interposed Miss Medlock with most artless sincerity.

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Olive; "to be sure, it wasn't anybody's fault."

"Don't be abashed at their laughing, Bessie," said Howard, who was smiling also. "Girls take a wicked delight in teasing each other, you know." After which audacious fling—as Miss Kirkwood termed it—Mr. Estill sank into a hammock and pretended to read. In reality he was listening with pleased interest to the busy conversation of the three happy maidens.

While this agreeable communion of youth and innocence was going on, Mr. Claycourt sauntered carelessly out of the wood with his gun, came up past Mrs. Ordlaw's house, as if by the merest accident, stopped, caught sight of the merry party, leaned lazily against the fence, and sighed a loud "heigh-ho!" It was such an explosive sigh that Mr. Estill heard it. So did Rilly. The young ladies might have, also, had not all three been talking at once—a sure indication of feminine enjoyment.

"Hello, old chap," Howard called, without getting up.

"Hello," replied Floyd languidly.

"Well, dear me, just look at that," exclaimed

Miss Kirkwood, as the attention of all was attracted to the new-comer, speaking of him as if he had been a sign-post just planted there. "What in the world are you standing there for?" she continued.

"Killing time—nothing else about here to kill," he replied.

"Come over and join the group," said Howard; "only leave that gun at a respectable distance."

Floyd stood the weapon up against a young cherry-tree, and accepted the invitation. "I'm jolly glad to find good company—it's such a deuced bore to be alone," he remarked explanatorily. And after he had performed his courtesies to Florence and Bessie, and pretended to pinch his cousin's rosy cheek, he turned to Rilly. "Come and shake hands, little beauty; and give me a honey-suckle, won't you? Thank you. What a lovely thing it is. Gather it in the glen?"

"Yes, me and Bessie picked 'em," replied Rilly.

"Did, eh? You always go with Miss Medlock?"

"Most always; and she goes sketching real often now."

"And Floyd goes gunning every day," exclaimed Miss Kirkwood significantly.

"Yes, ah, most remarkable coincidence," remarked Claycourt, in a half-stupid way, as if he did not quite understand what the laugh that followed was about. But he did not miss seeing the

pretty blush that came to Bessie's cheeks; and said to himself that she was just a dear dimpled charmer of a girl, and no mistake.

"It's positively wonderful how this gunning business takes," he remarked glibly; "sorry I never hit on to it before. Suppose if I stay around here a week every girl in the place will be going to sketch and gather honeysuckles in that glen."

"Oh, did you ever, girls! Just hear the egotistical wretch talk!" exclaimed Olive Kirkwood. "I think that we all ought to ignore him entirely."

"You can't ignore a fellow when he is blazing around promiscuously with a gun," reasoned Mr. Claycourt, quite unmoved; and his logic had the effect of making his timid hearers glance uneasily toward the cherry tree where the deadly implement reposed, and shudder at the possible consequences.

"There are some fellows who won't be ignored," assented Estill; "and not always those who handle firearms carelessly."

"And they always seem to do pretty well," Floyd remarked. "In fact, I don't think it's a good plan to cultivate extreme modesty at the expense of all the other virtues. It sort of unbalances a fellow, you know—makes him uncertain, like."

"Dear me," exclaimed Olive ironically. "Do

you think there is any danger of my cousin becoming unsteady from that cause, Mr. Estill?"

"Not in his nerve," replied Estill.

"Oh, come, you two!" protested Floyd; "you'll make Miss Medlock believe I'm cheeky. Don't you think they are inclined to be severe upon me, Miss Estill?"

"Perhaps taking a slight advantage while your gun is out of reach. But I don't think there is much danger of Bessie being unjustly prejudiced."

"No, don't be, Bessie—I mean Miss Medlock, don't be. You see my sweet cousin here—beg pardon for my familiarity, Cousin—just speaking metaphorically, you know—you see, she likes to be a bit sharp now and then, and thinks me a good subject to practice on. I bought her a parrot last year, but the poor thing died, poor thing! and it looks as if I would have to endure it. I don't mean to work too much upon your sympathies, Miss Bessie, but, ah, if you could pity me a little, it would—ah, sweeten my bitter lot."

"I should be afraid to refuse, I think," replied Bessie.

"Oh, don't speak of fear," Floyd quickly rejoined; "my disposition is truly docile, and I'm quite harmless."

"The gun being out of his hands," suggested Howard. And spurred on by Olive and Estill, Floyd chattered on in this whimsical fashion,

sometimes half mystifying, but always entertaining the village maidens.

While he was thus playing leading comedy part with such marked success, he was interrupted by a new arrival, who did not wait at the gate to be invited in. It was a swarthy, round-featured, bare-headed woman. Her black hair was plaited and peculiarly bound up with a wealth of bright, orange ribbon. She wore a small red shawl which, falling carelessly from her shoulders, showed that her large-figured calico bodice was uniquely decollete. Her skirt had stripes of blue and yellow in it, and was short enough to expose to view hose of an equally interesting variety of colors. A gypsy, of course.

Seeing the consternation that she had caused, the intruder threw out her hands in a manner that would have done credit to Ristori, and laughed heartily enough to be reassuring.

"The nice ladies be not afraid," she said, "I come offer you much great pleasure;" and she laughed again.

"An Indian," exclaimed Claycourt.

"Indian," retorted the woman with a contemptuous laugh. "No Indian. Me gypsy—Nan the gypsy. From very strange land. Can tell you all very strange things—true things—me see into the future. The nice ladies must have their fortunes told—so great pleasure. The fine gentleman surely give me dollar to tell ladies'

fortune?" And she turned her eloquence the second time upon Claycourt.

Floyd gazed at her comically, till everybody laughed at the situation, and then said, with a subdued air, "I confess myself a captive, and shekels of tribute will I pay. There's silver for thee, Nan. Make the stories rose-tinted and beautiful, now. No bad dreams, or heartbreakings, or such things—see?"

Nan assured him that she was of mystical lineage, had most phenomenal powers of divining the future, and would therefore relate nothing that would be unsatisfactory.

"That's right," he rejoined, in way of caution; "nothing but the pearl-mounted truth—good news, lots of money, manly husbands, ahem! fortunes across the sea, good digestions—that sort of thing —see?"

Nan said she saw clearly, and thus pledged to veracity, her patons ought certainly to have been satisfied with her divinations. This method is suggested to those impatient mortals who are not satisfied with the trouble they already have, but seek clairvoyants in order to anticipate that of the future.

Nan was a most subservient sorceress. She began with Miss Kirkwood, taking her little white hand into her own large brown ones and constructing a very pretty prospect for that young lady.

"The queen knows her business," exclaimed Floyd proudly; at which Nan's black eyes gleamed gloriously.

"The daughter of the ancient kings of Egypt and Arabia stands in solidly with the Fates, if she is color-blind," he continued, critically observing her somewhat startling costume.

This tearing the veil away from the future continued with more or less mystification and ambiguity till every one had had a peep behind it, except Estill, who still reposed in his hammock and touched off occasional incredulous and ironical remarks.

"Now, really, it is wonderful!" protested Miss Kirkwood; 'some of those things *did* happen—I know they did."

"Yes, to thousands of individuals—and are likely to keep on happening," Estill replied.

"See here, old chap, come into the game or keep quiet," put in Floyd. "This revelation business is too popular to be sneered at. Come and try your luck anyway—you don't have to buy any chips?"

With such technical assurance, Howard could not well resist the numerous solicitations, and the queasy queen soon had him at her mercy.

"Oh, you have very much to find out," she began.

"A most astounding revelation, truly," remarked Howard.

"And you are only just beginning," she continued. "At first you do not believe, and then you are much surprised. Then you fall very much in love. Oh, so very much in love!"

"That's right, my black-eyed Glory," interrupted Claycourt, "make it thick and strong—he's a hardened old sinner."

"You have great heap o' trouble," she went on, "but it all come out right after long time. A much bad man do you great injury—let me see, how? Not about the love—no—about the money. There be much money for you to get some time.

"Yes, uncounted millions—to get," said Howard. "What a matchless oddity a fortune-telling would be without love and money in it—wouldn't it?"

"But then you surely be very happy in the end, for you get very pleasantly surprised, and after that you get married to very blue-eyed, beautiful lady, and after awhile you get much money, and the wicked man, he make you no trouble any more, and then—of course you be happy."

"And then the millennium," added Estill.

Everybody was highly pleased at the outcome, and the young ladies declared that it was just the loveliest one yet. When the visitors were gone, Florence said to him—

"I believe some of those things will come true to you, brother."

"Why—because the gypsy predicted them?"

"No—because you deserve them. Not only that about money, but about the love."

"Why, Florence, do you think it would make me a better boy?"

"No, indeed, but I believe it would make you a happier one."

"Bless your dear little heart."

"And you have never said anything to me about it. I have wondered why you did not take me into your confidence about that, too."

"Why, little sister, I should feel guilty, if I had ever been seriously, honestly in love and have kept it entirely from you. But I—ahem—haven't permitted myself to be."

"I used to dream that sometime you might—"

"Had some one in view for me, eh?" he inquired, as Florence hesitated.

"You know Bessie Medlock has been growing so pretty, and I thought if you would only fall in love with her—"

"Ha, ha, you dear little match-maker," laughed Howard. "It was perfectly natural—I see."

"But I was convinced this afternoon that there was no use of my thinking about it any longer."

"Exactly. Think you are quite right. Bessie wouldn't be at all likely to care for me, and . . ."

"That isn't the reason at all," Florence interrupted him to say.

"No? Then what?" he asked more seriously.

"I couldn't help seeing how you and Miss Kirkwood looked at each other."

"I'm a little surprised," he remarked, smiling.

"I know she feels a very deep interest in you, brother. Her eyes are so honest, I could read it in them."

Howard gazed thoughtfully at the carpet, but did not speak.

"And I think she is a very lovely girl, Howard. Not any more so than dear Bessie—but I think I would like her very much if we were often together."

"Well, it is very pleasing to me to hear you say so, Florence, for I believe Miss Kirkwood is a worthy young lady. But our acquaintance has been short, and is likely to be transient. Oh, it's so very easy to meet charming girls at summer resorts—or almost anywhere else, for that matter. There are a great many of them. But I have never allowed myself to consider one of them before *you*, my little angel."

"Oh, Howard, you are too good to me. I know I could not live without you. But you could love me just as much if you loved some once else too, couldn't you?"

"It might be—but there are other considerations. There, let us not talk about it any more."

"But I am sure Miss Kirkwood likes you."

"It may be a fancy. I will confide in you all I can—I think well of her, too. But you know I

am going back to the city *to work*. It may not appear so important to you, dear, but a fellow depending on a moderate income has no right to fall in love with a girl like Miss Kirkwood."

Poor Florence remained silent some moments after this, with a shade of sadness on her delicate features. She had not realized that the distance between them was so very great, and as to that, it seemed to her that her brother was worthy to aspire to the hand any young lady, heiress or queen.

Howard rejoiced that Rilly came bounding in with a laugh and a story, and changed the conversation. That evening he did not go to the inn, and was provoked because he could not keep his thoughts from continually straying off there.

"It is strange how a passing infatuation will make a fellow uneasy," he soliloquized; "I will bring it to a close as soon as I can—conveniently."

CHAPTER VII.

TEARS AT THE INN, LAUGHTER AT THE COTTAGE.

ON the following day when Estill encountered Claycourt he had just been persuing a letter that came in the morning's mail.

"You remember that rusty individual who came into my room and introduced himself as a lawyer?" he said, speaking to Claycourt about it. "He's writing me about my lost inheritance —seems really to be making investigations—probably hasn't anything else to do. Wouldn't it be odd if the disreputable-looking old Insect should stumble upon some valuable clew? He writes about an Estill in Michigan engaged in the honorable avocation of agriculture! Just listen to that phrase—"honorable avocation of agriculture"—isn't that a rounder? And about another family of the name in Pennsylvania pecuniarily interested in the production of petroleum! Just catch the effect of that line on your attentive ear. And now he is beginning to hint at the expenses that must be provided for. Think I'll advise B. Murchison to turn his attention to literature, and let the Estill estate lie wherever it is buried."

"Yes, I would keep shy of a man with a literary style like that," replied Claycourt.

At this moment Mr. Kirkwood joined the group, looking spruce and comfortable. His quick, nervous glances, and directness of speech were closely observed by Howard.

"Uncle Watson has a great head for this sort of business—why don't you ask a pointer of him?" continued Floyd.

"I think it would be idle to bore Mr. Kirkwood with so foolish a scheme," Howard replied.

"I don't think business ever bores my uncle," rejoined Floyd. "Isn't that so, Uncle?"

"Never when I can be of any service," said Mr. Watson, politely.

"You are very kind, but I fear this case is hardly worth explaining. You probably know that I am from the South. My father died in the Confederate army and his small estate disappeared. Sundry accommodating lawyers persist in offering their services toward finding it. I was just reading an odd letter from one."

Mr. Kirkwood listened attentively. "Well," he asked, "do any of them succeed?"

"Not as far as my information goes," replied Estill.

"Who's trying it now?"

"No one in particular; a shyster naméd Murchison is trying to interest me anew in it."

"Why, had you given it up?"

"Several years ago. Got tired of spending money on the case to no end but disappointment."

"Exactly. Speaking in general terms, I should say you show your wisdom. There's nothing so delusive as that sort of game. Ah, from Georgia, did you say?"

"No, Mississippi—Vicksburg."

"Ah," said Mr. Kirkwood, and appeared to be much impressed with this bit of common information.

"Perhaps if you fully knew Mr. Estill's remarkable experience, you would advise him differently," put in Claycourt with good intentions, but which brought something like a frown to Estill's forehead; he dreaded the possibility of having to recite his experiences again.

"Remarkable, eh?" queried Mr. Kirkwood.

"Not unusual for the times and events," replied Estill. And in the briefest manner possible he outlined his history.

Mr. Kirkwood seemed to chew his cigar, rather than smoke it, while listening.

"Very unfortunate," he remarked. "That war was terrible. It's evil consequences will long survive. The good that comes out of it must be very great to balance the account." Mr. Kirkwood was visibly affected by the sad contemplation. But Major Derryberry came jostling along and disturbed the serious train of thought by

dilating upon the beauty of the morning, the delightful atmosphere, and incomparable advantages of Ayresboro for summer habitation.

"There's nothing else like it on the continent," continued the Major, who had just partaken of his morning julep, and was corresponding enthusiastic; "nothing at all like it. Just step out on this veranda, gentlemen, into this fresh and fragrant air, and gaze off yonder, down that valley, and to the mountains beyond! Isn't it glorious, isn't it a dream for an artist? And the wood-covered hills off here, forming a perfect background to the admirable situation. Yes, sir, gentlemen, we have a glorious place, and with our unrivalled waters, and air fresh from the dewy mountains, we are bound to become famous. Do you take a little something in the morning, gentlemen?"

"I haven't any great fancy for those waters, thank you, major. They are too overpowering, nasty," apologized Howard.

"Waters to the devil," retorted the major with the spirit of rebuke. "Leave that stuff to the invalids. Nominate something else!"

But as Howard caught sight of Mrs. Kirkwood and Olive at this moment he deferred his share in the nomination and joined them. Mrs. Kirkwood's whims had evidently beeen promptly attended to that morning, for she was quite amiable. To be sure, she mentioned three or four things about

the inn that she considered perfectly horrid, and complained a little that the sunshine beat down around the house so brightly, there being a sad lack of shade-trees and awnings. And also mentioned incidently that the people who arrived the day before were exceedingly plain, prosy creatures, without any style whatever. But aside from these, and an occasional reprimand of Hopson, she was in a very pleasant mood.

"It is so trying to refined sensibilities to see things continually that offend good taste. But what can one do, when one must come to such a place as this, Mr. Estill?"

"Perhaps my tastes are not æsthetic," replied Estill; "but I have thought the place quite agreeable."

"Speaking of the natural environment, quite true. But there are so many odd creatures of people. Such peculiar ways and habits."

"I fear my dear mamma is critical," remarked Olive.

"My child, I must be—I could not live a day without being so—I am a Southener, and you know, Mr. Estill, your true Southener is nothing if not critical."

"The natural-born critic has quite enough to keep him busy in this world," replied Estill.

"And in spite of us all there is so much bad form, and things do go shuffling along in such vulgar manner!" And Mrs. Kirkwood sighed

as if she had been all her life making heroic endeavors to elevate the human race from its depravity, and was now giving it up in sorrow and disgust.

From this depressing topic she passed on to patriotism, and from that to travel and the drama. Mr. Estill proved a delightful conversationalist, in so much that he talked very little, listened politely, and offered no contradictions. Therefore Mrs. Kirkwood found it very agreeable to discourse to him, and he made steady advance in her good graces.

All this while Olive said hardly a word, but sat as if quite contented with the company she was in. Whenever Howard's eyes met hers, which was not unfrequent, there was a happy gleam in them, and a pleasant smile ready on her face. It did not require words to keep up communication between them.

Gradually the group became larger, as other guests sought the shady verandas, and soon the cotillion party again became the subject of discussion.

"You don't seem to take much interest in it," said Olive to Howard.

"I haven't given it a great deal of thought."

"I have heard you say you were very fond of dancing, too. Surely, they haven't omitted you from the list—"

"Oh, no. The major was kind enough to extend me an invitation."

"I know we will have a very pleasant time, although it is rather early in the season, and there's not likely to be a great many."

"I have no doubt you will," he replied.

"How you talk—just as if you were going to be a thousand miles away!" she exclaimed. "Of course you are coming—if you don't we will never forgive you."

"Why, are you going to be short of men?" he asked.

"Now you know that doesn't make any difference at all, Please don't be contrary."

"Pray don't suspect me of it," he said quickly. "I am sure I had no such intention. But you know I must think first of my sister. If I should say to her that I was going to leave her all the evening to attend a ball, don't you think she would feel lonely and unfortunate?"

Olive remained silent for a moment. "It is so noble of you to think of her so tenderly," she replied, "but I am sure she would wish you to spend a pleasant evening, and would not complain at the sacrifice."

"Well, I shall probably run over for an hour or two," Estill said finally. "Think I will— a little late perhaps."

"Ha, ha, ha," chuckled Claycourt, tripping down the steps to where they were standing,

"what a rare old character that major of yours is," speaking of him as if he were Estill's personal chattel. "I'm just beginning to appreciate him. —Come down to the stable with me, old fellow, and take a look at the nags. Major says they are all right, and we may want to ride, you know."

Howard begged Miss Kirkwood to excuse him, and the two went away together. Olive turned into the house feeling disappointed and piqued. For awhile she tried to be indifferent, and to act a merry part with a little knot of young ladies which she joined; but her grievance was too heavy. She soon slipped away to her room, drew the shade to shut out the glad sunlight which seemed a mockery, locked the door carefully, and ducking her pretty head between pillows, gave vent to her wretchedness in a bitter sob—"He never—asked me—to go—go to the ball with him!"

Poor little dear! She wouldn't have had anybody on earth, no, not any body, know that she was crying about such a thing. Perhaps some cynical folks may smile, and say she was a little dunce. Very prim-minded people, who scorn the miserable shred of a newsboy and take a loud interest in the heathen of remote lands, would probably say that her actions were not only altogether foolish, but improper as well. The idea of a well-bred young lady crying on account of a young

man whom she got really acquainted with only last week—tst, tst, tst!

Nevertheless, Olive was vexed and very unhappy, poor girl; and no amount of popular sympathy would have allayed her distress. The balm and poultice of pity and commiseration rarely prove efficacious in this particular form of affliction. There was only one doctor in the world who could have furnished instant relief in this case, and he was frittering away his time at the stable, hands in pockets, dilating upon the many points of demerit in the steeds quartered there, and explaining to Floyd Claycourt the general peculiarities of spavin and horse rheumatism.

After crying a spell Olive felt a trifle better, but by no means cured. A gleam of hope entered her heart, and finally she raised the window-shade, letting the sunshine brighten the room again. It took some little time to re-arrange her pretty wavy hair with just the proper effect of morning negligence, and several minutes more were spent in artistic endeavor to erase with the aid of powder-puffs and other toilet accessories the weepy traces from about her eyes.

"It's only eleven o'clock," she mused; "there's a possible chance yet. Perhaps he will come back this way, or call around in the afternoon. But that's putting it off very late! The thought seemed never to occur to him to invite me, although I gave him every opportunity in the world.

He seems so thoughtful and considerate about most things, too. And perhaps he might think of it all at once, and write me a note. Oh, dear—wouldn't that set my heart to beating! I wonder just how I would feel, getting a letter from him for the first time? He's a professional writer, too—I am sure he would say something very pretty. Wonder if he ever composes poetry? Let me see—I wonder what I had better wear to-night? A simple costume would no doubt please him best. And I'll have Jeannette do my hair up as high as ever she can—I *do* wish I was a few inches taller."

She went down to the veranda, where she found Mr. Harrell and her mamma, and sat for an hour gazing down the road that led to the stable; but Mr. Estill came not back that way. Luncheon proved a very uninteresting repast for Olive, and when she lay down for her customary afternoon nap, all sorts of hopes and fears and fancies passed through her mind before she fell asleep.

It was quite late when she awoke, and it seemed to her such a long, long time since morning. She did not feel vivacious at all. Her dear mamma was not in the best of spirits, either, and the rosy hue of existence was not by any means at its brightest. While she was dressing, and doing as well as she could to recover her wonted enthusiasm, a bell-boy brought her a letter. Her heart, gave one wild leap. The color quickened in her

face and her wavy brown hair trembled with her emotion.

"It's from *him*—I know it is—I would have known his writing on anything—it is just like him. Ha, ha, he did remember—I am sure of it!" and more of this nature she exclaimed and thought during the moment that it took her to open the envelope. The first thing she did was to glance at the signature—sure enough, *Howard Estill.* Then she eagerly read—"Dear Miss Kirkwood—I should be happy to have your company for a ride to-morrow morning at eight, if you have no previous engagement. The saddle-horses are not first-rate, but will do. Called to see you this afternoon, but you were not visible. Ah, come to think of it—it will be 'next morning, (after the ball), and of course you will be tired and sleepy—make it morning following."

Olive looked on both sides of the paper, and could scarcely credit her senses—that was all there was of it! And almost a dead disappointment, too. It was plain that Mr. Estill was not looking forward with fluttering and anxiety to the festivity of the evening.

"He's just too awfully aggravating" Olive, complained, throwing down the open letter. "Why couldn't he think of dancing first—it's just as easy to leave his sister for that as for riding! He's real horrid—but it's real nice of him to invite me to ride—it will be delightful. But what

was the use of his saying I would be tired and sleepy! That isn't pretty or complimentary. And he doesn't say a word about his coming to-night. I believe I'll refuse to dance with him if he does come. Oh, dear, he must look splendid on horseback—I know we will have a lovely ride, but I don't see why he can't be more consistent."

In this somewhat oscillating frame of mind Miss Kirkwood directed the elevation of her coiffure.

Mr. Estill, after leaving Claycourt, spent a good part of the day, or what remained of it, at his desk. He had a number of letters to answer, and some special work to do, so that he was with his sister very little till near tea-time. They had simple country tea at Mrs. Ordlaw's—some thin slices of cold chicken or cold chipped beef, a bit of jelly or honey, warm biscuits, fruit sauce, cookies, and tea. It would have suited Estill's constitution better if he could have had a bottle of beer and a sandwich some time before retiring; but his sleep was none the worse for having to forego those bohemian delicacies.

"You haven't been very sociable to-day," said Florence when he came down.

"Suppose I must plead guilty," Howard replied. "I managed somehow to waste most of the morning over at the inn, and I have been really busy this afternoon, except just to run over to the inn on an errand. I'm going to try one of the major's saddle-horses, and thought I'd give

Miss Kirkwood a chance to try another at the same time. May be rash; for the major's stock doesn't inspire the fullest confidence. They're a wild-eyed lot, at the best—but I guess too jointy to be very dangerous."

"Oh, dear, I wish I could go, too," exclaimed Florence, as if Howard's description prefigured superb enjoyment.

"I'm so sorry you can't, sissy," said Howard feelingly. To hear her speak so almost made him regret inviting Miss Kirkwood.

"I presume they were in a bustle of preparation for the party to-night at the Snowflake?" remarked Mrs. Ordlaw.

"I didn't take much note of it," replied Howard.

"I suppose it will be splendid," spoke up Florence; "and just think—would you believe it!—Bessie Medlock is going, too. Got an invitation from Mr. Claycourt, if you please."

"That makes it worse still," thought Howard; but he smiled in surprise and said that Mr. Claycourt was behaving very handsomely. Hoped Bessie would have a famous time. No doubt it would be a great event for her.

"I do wish I could see how she looks there," said Florence; "more beautiful than ever, I suppose. You must tell me all about her—and be sure to pay her a great deal of attention, won't you?"

"Most willingly. I had half a mind not to go, but suppose I ought, especially under the circumstances."

Some way, in spite of the talk about gaieties, and pleasant prospects, the evening did not appear to be a very joyous one. There was not much animation in the little family, and Howard could not avoid a feeling of regret, or something that told him he was not doing his duty to his sister in a perfectly brotherly manner.

The air was too cool to be outdoors toward sunset, and Howard and Florence were together in the little parlor as the twilight came on. He sat by the window and read to her a story from a magazine, until it grew too dark, after which he tossed aside the book, settled down close beside her chair, and caressed her little hands. What perfect calm there was! Those were moments that brought feelings of true happiness into Florence's heart, and deepened Howard's sympathy and love for her.

"Recite 'The Sands o' Dee' for me, won't you?" she asked. Howard had a good voice, and literary taste that enabled him to give exquisite interpretation to poetry, and Florence never tired of hearing him. He recited the piece she asked for, and a number of other pretty little things; told her of interesting incidents in the lives of the poets; related other simple but impressive anecdotes; all in perfect harmony with the quiet hour,

and thought nothing of time till Mrs. Ordlaw brought in the parlor lamp.

"I'm sorry to leave you, sissy," he said, looking at his watch, "but I'm not a very rapid dresser, and I presume I had better get at it if I am going to do honor to the Snowflakers to-night."

"We have had such a delightful hour," she said, sighing at the thought of his leaving.

"Beautiful," he replied, kissing her tenderly, "and I hope you will be happy for the remainder of the evening."

"Oh, yes, I am sure I will."

"And you must not let her get lonely, auntie," he said to Mrs. Ordlaw as he left the room.

An hour later he came down the narrow staircase radiant in evening dress, with a light overcoat loosely around his shoulders. He paused at the parlor door, and saw Florence all alone, reading. She looked so solitary and helpless that her situation touched his heart keenly.

"What, reading yet, sissy?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I am just finishing the magazine story. It ends rather pathetically," she answered.

"I am almost sorry for that—hoped it would come out jolly," he said. He remembered that all the events of the evening had tended to put them both in an emotional frame of mind, and the thought of deserting her, and leaving her to sad fancies while he was away in the midst of merriment was too unpleasant to put aside. He deter-

mined to cheer her into a jollier mood at any event.

Florence had a banjo, which she was very fond of, and with which she amused herself many hours when alone. Howard took up the instrument from its accustomed corner, and began twinking a lively negro melody; changed lightly to grotesque "patter music," and soon had Florence smiling broadly. That was sufficient encouragement. "De ex'cises am now fully originated," he gravely announced in inimitable darky dialect, with more odd twing-twang effects from the in-instrument. Then he sang a rollicking piece—a rousing old Mississippi plantation song in which there was a grotesque mixture of jubilation, superstition and other nonsense, wherein the darkies become "glorifired," and "the debil" is hilariously scouted as growing correspondingly "mighty tired." After this he exploded an assortment of jokes and conundrums with marvellous effect—some of them with a suspiciously strong "end-man" flavor; but they took immensely with his audience.

Florence laughed and applauded enthusiastically; and before he had finished Rilly stole out of bed, and stood in her nightgown peeping in through a half-closed door, her eyes dangerously wide open, her face a study of surprise and delight. Then Howard launched into quaint stories and mirth-provoking antics that would have turned

most of the star minstrel performers chalk-white with envy.

From that he got to telling Florence about the funny characters in the comedies. No one would have picked him out for a mimic, nor one given to pranks and frolics, but on special occasions he was a rare hand at droll capers. To-night he was unusually happy—perhaps he had never exerted himself more to be amusing and diverting. He told how Cap'n Cuttle dressed, and showed how he walked; hit off Lord Dundreary in a half-dozen different situations; changed to the quaint old Yankee, Solon Shingle, with his bar'l of apple-sass, squeak in his voice, and other eccentricities, and gave lengthy imitations of Mr. Jefferson in lovable old Rip Van Winkle.

He was sitting carelessly on the table, reciting Rip's story of trouble and domestic infelicity soliloquizing that if ever Gretchen did "got schtumm'le in der vater now she got to schwim;" when Mrs. Ordlaw put in an appearance.

"Sakes alive, what does this mean?" she inquired, quite surprised at the situation of both actor and audience.

"Oh, you have missed it by not being here all the time, auntie. Brother has been going through such wonderfully funny things. Oh, dear, I have laughed till I am tired." And Florence dried her eyes, as if she had been crying.

"Hope you will sleep all the better for it," said

Howard; "don't know when I've made just such an exhibition of myself before. Don't often get such a good chance."

"But are you forgetting?" asked Mrs. Ordlaw; "here it is nearly twelve o'clock, and you not gone to the party yet. It will be over before you get there!"

"Twelve o'clock, eh? So it is," Howard replied, taking up his coat, and kissing Florence good-night. "Party to the bow-wows—I've had fun enough here, for to-night, and I'm going to bed."

CHAPTER VIII.

A REBUKE, AN EPISODE, AND AN ACCIDENT.

HOWARD felt that he had performed a very pleasant duty, and consequently slept soundly. When he awoke in the morning, and lay at full length on his back, with his hands above his head, "to rest awhile before getting up," as he explained to himself, he fell to wondering what sort of time there had been over at the Snowflake the night before.

"It was quite the proper caper for me to stay away," he soliloquized in a self-congratulatory mood. "I must say for myself that it was quite a nervy act, all things considered. It was something that probably I could not have done five years ago. Glad I'm arriving at a point where I have less regard for such frivolities, and more cool sense. Gives one a more satisfied feeling. Good sign—feeling of gratification after doing the sensible thing. . . . What business have I with balls and summer-hotel idlers, anyway? If old Ecclesiastes had had some experience of that sort, then he *would* have bewailed the vanities of life. Yet, I suppose I'd play a great hand at it, if I wasn't

such a poor devil. . . . Wonder if I'm doomed always to be so? What contempt a rich and successful man, like Kirkwood, for instance, must feel for a fellow who hasn't anything, hasn't *done* anything, and isn't *doing* anything! Keen man, that Kirkwood. A born financier, I should say. Queer how some men take to making money. Don't suppose he ever dreams of anything else. Supposing Claycourt's scheme should carry, and I should get in with him, and he should take kindly to me, and I should be able to get along with him—wonder what it would lead to? It might mean for me a competence in a few years, independence, popularity, and—Olive Kirkwood. I would be junior partner and son-in-law.

"What nonsensical castle-building for a sensible man of mature years to be guilty of! It would have been idle enough if I had dreamed it while I was asleep. . . . Hang it!—why can't I stop thinking about that dear girl! She captivates me—or would if I gave her chance enough. Evidently she doesn't dislike me, either. . . No—it's foolish to think seriously about it. The path is not clear for me. My better way is to get back to the city again, and to work."

It was high noon before he left the cottage. At least, it was noon. Near the springs he met Miss Kirkwood, whose day had but just begun.

"You deserve to be passed by with only a nod," she said, looking up at him rebukefully.

"A wordless nod is cold salutation," he replied seriously.

"And I had half a mind to do it, too."

"It's not a good plan to do anything without your whole mind," was his didactic rejoinder.

"Why did you disappoint us so, last night? It wasn't at all graceful."

"I didn't suppose that a very great many would lament my absence."

"Oh, you are very modest. If it was only one, I presume you care nothing at all."

"Pray don't think so—it would be wrong. I did start, but—"

"With only half a mind, I suppose," she interrupted, archly.

"Exactly. And you see I didn't get there. Now, don't think I meant to be stubborn—it wasn't that. My poor little sister didn't seem to be feeling cheerful, and I spent the evening in trying to entertain her. Both my mind and heart were in that, and I think I succeeded. Ahem—doubtful if I would have done half as well anywhere else."

Olive remained silent for several minutes. Howard saw that she had taken the matter really seriously, and after all his conscience was not entirely at ease.

"I'm sorry if my absence caused you any—inconvenience," he said finally, ending his apology

in a rather awkward manner. It was not a particularly happy effort.

"Oh, as far as convenience went, we got along quite well without you," she replied.

"One consolation, truly," he rejoined. "Ahem —beautiful morning, isn't it? Hillside one glorious mass of green. Sunshine quivers against it. Dreamy sort of place, isn't it?"

Olive said yes, without looking around, or appearing to be the least bit entranced with the charms of nature.

"Let's sit on this ledge for a while," he continued. "Tell me about the party. How's your mamma feeling after it?"

"Very well; I think she'll be up again by to-morrow."

"Hope she will. Pleasant night for dancing, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but I didn't dance so very much."

"Music wretched?"

"Rather."

"About what I expected."

"Another reason you stayed away, I presume?"

It was Howard's inning to court silence a minute or two. It was clear that they were using words at each other, and not talking on sympathetic terms at all. Why not fully understand each other, and be confidential? That was what Howard felt. He began—

"The truth is, Miss Kirkwood, I have been thinking."

"If it affects you like that always, I should think you ought to stop it," she remarked.

"I must admit that I do, now and then. When it becomes oppressive. Hope it doesn't surprise you. But all joking and irony aside—I must be serious and practical, you know. And I was really thinking this morning that it wouldn't do for me to—ah—become engrossed in these holiday pleasures. I should have to break off from them very soon, and perhaps it might be a regret rather than a pleasant remembrance afterwards."

"I wouldn't have supposed that you would take such unhappy views of it. It doesn't seem like you at all."

"I wouldn't have you suspect that I am a cynic. It's not my nature. But, you see, I am several years older than you *in years*, and a great many older *in experience*. And much of it has been of a kind to make me thoughtful."

"Perhaps I haven't fully comprehended you."

"It would be somewhat strange if you had, in the short time that you have known me. Yet I should be very sorry to have you misunderstand me. We have been so very congenial—if we should part *now* no doubt we would always remember it with pleasure."

"I don't understand why you should talk so. You don't intend to go so very far away, do you?"

"Miss Kirkwood, distances of separation cannot always be measured by miles or leagues of land and sea."

"Doesn't your imagination help you at creating distances and barriers?" she asked.

"I don't think it does. When I write poetry, the editor says that I lack imagination entirely. Don't believe I have suddenly discovered it in this direction. You must not think that I am consulting my desires at all—I am only facing stern conditions with what seems to me the most prudence."

"But if it isn't going to make anybody any happier—"

Olive left her sentence a fragment, but a chapter could not better have described her thoughts. Howard was hardly prepared for it. He had already said more than he at first intended, and now he was farther away from a satisfactory understanding with her than ever. He was feeling less sure of the position he had taken, and pretty much at a loss how to proceed. Before this he had been concerned mainly about his own happiness or unhappiness; a very selfish consideration, as it appeared to him now. It was not at all displeasing to what vanity he had, to see such evidence of Olive's regard for him, but it made what had seemed a prudent course of action appear all the more difficult.

"I see my sermonizing isn't making anybody

the happier," he said more cheerfully. "Very well, we'll leave the rest of it unsaid. Of course, it's possible that I may not see all things in their true light. Ah, who are those two swells?—haven't seen them before." This question was asked after a couple of young men, who saluted Olive very graciously, had passed by.

"They just came yesterday," Olive explained after mentioning their names.

"Old acquaintances, I suppose?"

"Mr. Wilkins is papa's private secretary, and at our house a good deal. He is of a very good family."

"Ah. Quite a favorite with Mr. Kirkwood, I dare say."

"Papa says he's very bright and smart."

"It's strange how many wonderfully smart men there are in the world nowadays," remarked Howard with something suspiciously like a tinge of irony in his voice.

Olive modestly admitted that her knowledge on that score was somewhat limited, but instead of deploring the fact intimated that she was quite satisfied as it was.

Mr. Estill, for some reason, chose not to recognize the significance of this. But during the remainder of the interview said nothing more concerning his own worldly disadvantages.

When he strolled homeward from the Snowflake he soliloquized, sometimes aloud. "I might

have divined it," he muttered. "Kirkwood has no need of me. Claycourt might have seen that —but he never stops calmly to survey anything. Not that he aroused any hopes or expectations in me. But supposing he had, it would have been the same. It's quite the way with my blighting luck. Supposing I had set up a plan to get in with the old gentlemen, gain his confidence, make myself indispensable to him, and finally accept him as a father-in-law—if I had, see what a lumpy lot of dough my cake whould have been turned into by this smart chap, Wilkins, if that's his name! Shows my acumen in keeping out of it, that's all—I wonder if Olive really cares anything for that dapper youth, though? She appeared altogether too ready to speak a good word for him. No doubt he is playing his cards fine. Private secretaryship gives him great advantages. I'll have to ask Claycourt what sort of chap he is. But, hang it!—what's the use?" And Mr. Estill grew provoked at his own wavering inconsistency.

He stayed at the cottage all the afternoon, trying to persuade himself that his time was fully occupied, and that he wasn't allowing himself to think about Miss Kirkwood at all. But the number of times he gazed off toward the inn betrayed his inability to do so; and the disappointment that he felt when, upon hearing the rustle of a dress on the steps, and, looking around eagerly, found it was only Bessie Medlock, was

perfectly absurd, considering his assumed indifference.

He was not in the least sorry, either, when the morning came, and he went to join the little cavalcade at the Snowflake. It was a glorious morning, of sunshine, fragrance and dew, heaven-created, with the celestial imprint fresh upon it. And they started forth as merry as the larks that were soaring and singing above them. Up the road that wound around a mountain, and afforded a magnificent view of the village, and the valley with its streams and meadows and farm-houses, they went, drinking in the glorious morning air, and ever now and then breaking into a chorus of rhapsodies as some new scene suddenly came into full view.

Under such circumstances little note is taken of time or distance. After awhile a descent began, the uneven road winding through forests and masses of ferns and undergrowth. In this shade, and being much occupied with mutual entertainment, they did not observe for some time that clouds were rising. The morning failed to fulfil its fair promises. The sun's radiance became obscured, and not long afterwards big raindrops began to rattle down upon the quiet foliage. As the happy party rode into the broad valley they viewed this unkind threatening of the clouds with impatient expressions of annoyance, but that did not disturb the oncoming of the shower.

What should they do but ride faster and try to discover a house in which to take temporary shelter. But no house appeared, and ever thicker pattered the relentless raindrops.

"Mercy—goodness—are we going to get soaking wet!" exclaimed the young ladies distressfully; and the gallant cavaliers could do no better than reply it looked quite that way.

"Ha, ha, a smoke!" shouted Claycourt, who was riding ahead with Bessie Medlock, "ride faster!"

"A smoke—sure enough, a smoke; lay whip!" was the jubilant response. And there was such a clattering of iron hoofs over the stony road as it had never known before, that created a great flutter of surprise through the wayside foliage, and made the modest bluebells fairly jingle with alarm!

When they approached they found their guiding pillar of smoke issuing—not from a picturesque cabin, but from a stone fireplace constructed in the most primitive manner, and upon which rested an ugly black kettle. Close by was a dirty square tent, nearly as grimy as its neighbor, the kettle; and from every aperture of which was thrust a head in harmonious keeping with the environment. Behind this was a smaller, but not whiter, tent, and from both burst several lank, grizzly dogs, that greeted the riders with a most ferocious paroxysm of barking. It was a gypsy camp.

There was no time wasted in formal introductions. A stout, swarthy man emerged from the larger tent, to whom Estill shouted, "Hello Tom, we're coming in with you out of the rain;" and a swarthy woman followed half-way, to whom Claycourt exclaimed, "why, hello, Nan—it's you is it? Take these ladies in under shelter." And without waiting for invitation or agreement, the young ladies were lightly swung from their saddles to the protection of the dripping canvas. Estill followed with them, seeing their hesitation and looks of fear, while Claycourt and Wilkins put the horses under a rude shed that served for the gypsy stable. In a very few minutes the whole party were packed within the unimposing structure that served for the gypsy castle. It was a spacious one for three or four persons, but for nearly a score, the greater number of whom were just plain, aromatic, unwashed gypsies it was not exactly the place for grace and comfort, especially for exquisite young ladies. It might be a good cure for a certain variety of romanticism, but it was unpleasant medicine.

The rain pelted the flimsy canvas, and leaked in all around. At times it appeared to cease almost, but just when everybody thought that it was going to "let up," as Mr. Claycourt poetically expressed it, it came down again in greater floods than ever; and those who had stuck their heads out to look for clear sky (and incidentally to get a breath

of ungypsyized atmosphere) immediately drew them in again.

The ladies huddled together, with their handkerchiefs clasped fondly to their delicate noses, and waited as patiently as the typical young lady might be expected to under the conditions.

"Gracious me—what is it smells so?" whispered Miss Medlock.

"My, how should I know," answered Miss Kirkwood ruefully; "take care there, your greasing your dress against that ham!"

"So I am—oh, dear!" and Bessie gathered her skirts very close about her plump little self. "Suppose we should catch small-pox, or something else awful! Think there's any danger?"

"Don't know. I'm feeling faint at my stomach now. Do you think that little fellow there has measles?"

"No," replied Bessie, after a rapid examination; "just dirt spots. Look out, don't lean back against that ugly—liver, I guess it is! What do you suppose they'll ever do with it—uh!"

"S'h'h—don't speak so loud—they'll be offended. Don't you think it's really 'letting up' now, Mr. Estill?"

Mr. Estill stopped teasing the youngster with the aforesaid dirt-spots, and slipped out to survey the heavens.

In a moment he sneaked back with a face like a chapter out of Lamentations, and his suffering

companions knew that the rainbow was not yet athwart the sky.

"Must be rivers of it to come yet!" he murmured, wiping away that part of the fall that he caught inside his collar. The big gypsy ventured out to stir the contents of the stew-kettle, the flavor from which, wafted lightly into the tent, was so tangible as to appear almost visible. When he came back he was wet and fumy. Miss Kirkwood heard Estill saying something in an undertone about a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors; which sounded very like a quotation from something, but for her dear life she couldn't think what it was.

Mr. Claycourt, acting philosophically in the depths of misery, took a cursory inventory of his surroundings: Gypsies, big and little, dirty and comfortable; smoked bacon; cooking utensils; barrel of something sour; box of mystery; straw beds; pigs' livers; odd parts of gypsy wardrobe—very odd; dogs; playing cards, in an advanced state of decomposition; guns; whips; bag of meal; something done up in bundle; a sheepskin; bucket of tar; bits of harness, etc. Absence of soap. (Smells not catalogued.)

"Queerest joint I ever was in," remarked Mr. Claycourt, meditatively.

The other gentlemen offered no exceptions, and Miss Kirkwood made a mental observation that

she had now learned what sort of place a "joint" was.

Nan bustled around, not looking half as picturesque, and sadly shorn of her colors. She of course was anxious to unfold destiny again, in ample quantities, but the visitors were too much engrossed with the oppressive *now* to take any interest in it. And finding there was no chance for industry in that line she soon fell to beating up a most bewildering sort of batter in a wooden bowl.

"There, it *has* stopped!" exclaimed Miss Kirkwood, appearing to come out of something like a swoon; "there isn't a patter." There was a rush made for the hole in the canvas, and the joyous shouts and exclamations that followed their exit attested the truth of Olive's assertion. The rain had ceased, and there were great patches of blue sky visible.

Heavens, what a relief! Fresh, out-of-doors air, never, never seemed half so good before! The horses were brought out, to the windward side of the stew-kettle, which now, alas! fumed fireless; the big gypsy was remunerated, the little gypsies conciliated with small coins, and the party mounted; while at that instant it seemed as if some celestial hand must have touched a concealed button in the solar system, for the gorgeous sunlight burst forth and glorified the earth.

This was the most luxurious moment of the excursion. The birds sang as if they were ex-

pected to make music for everything alive, the chipmunks chattered, and there was a smell of exquisite fragrance from the freshened foliage.

"Did anyone ever experience such a delightful change!" exclaimed Miss Kirkwood. "What rapid transformations we have undergone within an hour!"

"It almost seems like coming out of a horrid nightmare," said Miss Medlock; "I'm sure I'll go through it again sometime in an ugly dream."

"Such an emancipation is much like an apotheosis," Mr. Estill remarked, and although it sounded somewhat ponderous, everybody admitted that it described their sensation exactly.

"It was really unfortunate, though, to have our jolly ride interrupted by such a deluge," complained Claycourt.

"I think *you* are very unappreciative," responded his pretty cousin reprovingly; I don't think one of us should be sorry a minute. I think it was a jolly lark—now that it is over, and the disagreeable captivity of a few minutes added to our power of enjoying sunshine and freedom. Indeed, I believe we should feel very thankful to Providence."

"I stand corrected—a very pious amendment," replied Claycourt meekly. Mr. Estill said nothing, but meditated that it was exactly like his Aunt Ordlaw, and Sister Florence; and that after all, it was a beautiful spirit in woman; skeptic as

he was, Miss Kirkwood could not have said anything more pleasing to him.

In the earlier part of the ride Howard had a horse that showed considerably more mettle than any of the other mounts. Olive had admired him, and regretted that her own steed was not equally high-spirited.

"I fear you would find it very tiresome to manage him," Howard had replied; "for he needs to be held close in check. He would run with the least bit of encouragement."

"I'm sure I could control him," Olive asserted. "I used to ride father's Selim, and he was awfully high-spirited."

Howard admitted that she was an accomplished horse-woman; and before re-mounting at the camp he had her saddle transferred to his eager charger, whose ardor he thought had been somewhat abated by the morning's exercise.

Olive was delighted with the exchange. Confident of her position, and aware that her skill and courage would appear admirable to Mr. Estill, she kept her seat proudly.

All went well for a mile or two, but gradually the party became separated, Estill and Miss Kirkwood taking the lead. It was not long before the mettlesome animal discovered that he was much more master of the situation than with his former rider, and when held to a slow pace frisked around accordingly. Howard kept

close beside, not at any time entirely without anxiety.

At length they forded a wider stream than those which they had previously crossed, and coming out of the water the pebbly road for a short distance led up a steep bank. While ascending here, Olive imprudently touched her horse with her whip. It was like touching off a charge of powder by electricity. He made a quick plunge forward, and was off like a shot, the bit between his teeth, and his slender rider entirely at his mercy. No antics, or undignified kicking, but a straight racing dash, that is much better to be taken on a clear track than over rough and uncertain mountain roads.

Estill applied his whip and made a sturdy effort to keep even pace, but in a moment found that he was being left far behind. The fear that seized him was almost sickening. He thought of the rocky and uneven roads, places made dangerously slippery by the recent rain, possible precipices, fatality!

"My God, why did I place her in such peril!" he exclaimed in the bitterness of self-censure.

There were numerous turns in the road, and Miss Kirkwood in her unwilling flight was soon lost to view. At first she tried very hard to stop her horse, but all her strength counted as nothing. It seemed as if she might as well have tried to check a runaway locomotive. Her arms ached,

and she never before in any situation felt so puny and helpless. The trees sped by almost at a dizzy rate. Now the clattering of metal hoofs upon rock and pebble was frightful, and now they splashed most recklessly through muddy pools and ruts. The on-rushing steed was not the least bit particular about picking his way; and at the moment of her greatest danger Olive, as she felt a slushy shower descending upon her, was not unmindful of its effect. "What an awful sight I will be—and, oh, my new habit!" she thought, with truly feminine characteristic, strong even in peril.

Then, despairing of force, she tried coaxing; called the beast pet names, told him sympathetically to whoa, and in reassuring tones begged him not to frighten! But that appeared equally ineffectual. She brushed furiously against overhanging twigs, still laden with the new-fallen raindrops. At times she leaned quickly forward to avoid apparent danger of being dashed against some sturdy bough that stretched far over the roadway. Once for an instant she saw a wide brook before her, and was seized with an apprehension of being plunged into it and drowned, but almost before the thought had time to become a fear, the ground seemed to be lost beneath her, she had a momentary sensation of delirious flight; the hoof-beats broke again upon the pebbles, and the streamlet flowed behind them.

She passed a log-cabin that snuggled close at the foot of a hill, a few rods from the thoroughfare. A zigzag fence ran in front of it, with a pair of bars instead of a gate, upon which a scythe was left hanging carelessly. A couple of frowsy children played dangerously near, which Olive remarked in passing. The cabin door was open. Inside there was a table, with a woman kneading bread upon it, her sleeves rolled up nearly to her shoulders. Upon the pegs outside the door hung a dish-pan, and one or two other utensils of tin, near which was some kind of animal skin tacked against the wall to dry. Over the upper part of the cabin window was a paper shade, with large flowery figures, and upon the sill were some dishes.

All this Miss Kirkwood clearly observed in a moment as she sped by, and every detail of the scene was perfectly photographed upon her memory.

She saw, too, the woman glance out of the door at her with an expression of dull amazement, the children peep through the bars with open-mouthed wonder, some speckled chickens scamper through the fence in noisy alarm, and a pretty calf browsing on a grass-plot near by.

The sound of her approach was the signal for a couple of lank, grizzly curs to bound out into the road, barking as if they intended to devour alive whatever was coming, no matter how formidable.

They came at the dashing steed like a brace of famished wolves; he gave one scornful, vigorous kick as he passed; there was a responsive breaking of a canine neck, and the poor cabin-dweller had one dog less to feed from his meagre larder that day.

Finding that all her efforts were futile, Olive could only keep her seat as courageously as possible, and hope for an early finish. At length there came a feeling of reassurance, as she noticed that the runaway was beginning to pant. Steady, old fellow—you'll get tired of this after a little! It's not so easy running in the mud, and your track has been very heavy. Olive saw that his pace was slackening, and ventured to glance behind to discover if her escort was near. At this moment a declivity in the road, which now led over smoother ground, was reached. For the first time the horse missed his footing. The spot was slippery. Olive felt him stagger and plunge downward—felt herself hurdled violently from the saddle and dashed to the ground; there was a shock of pain, and darkness!

Howard Estill heard the barking of dogs in the distance, and rightly guessed that it was at the runaway horse. Riding at the fullest speed attainable, he in turn passed the cabin, but observed neither open doorway, nor bars, nor astonished human gazers—scarcely heard or heeded the disturbing growls of an angry dog.

He came into an open, where the roadbed was more yielding, and grass grew more luxuriantly by the way. Peering ahead with anxious intensity, now leaning quickly to the right, and again to the left, and now rising high in the stirrups, to gain advantage of view, his eyes suddenly rested on the still form of Olive Kirkwood lying but a few yards away. Springing from his horse, he approached her, trembling with the shock of grief and pain. Her dress and hair were dishevelled. She was motionless. He turned her face to him—it was white. He raised her tenderly in his arms.

"Oh, dear heaven! is she killed? is she killed? Beautiful darling, you can not be dead—no, no, you can not be dead!" He chafed her hands and smoothed back her hair. Olive moved and groaned.

"No, no darling, you are not dying; you must not die;" and running to a brook not far away, he carried water in his hands, bathing her face refreshingly.

"Oh, help me," she exclaimed at last, and Estill redoubled his exertions to restore her to life. In a moment more she opened her eyes, gazed into Howard's face, and sobbed. "You are so good," she said, speaking with scarcely audible voice.

"Thank heaven, you are not dying, darling!

You do know me, poor girl!—then forgive me, won't you—sweet girl, won't you forgive me?"

He held her gently in his arms; he felt the faint pressure of her hand, that had been lying so lifeless in his, and repeating her name again and again, he kissed her white face in a transport of gladness.

"I am so glad . . . it has happened so," she replied, smiling faintly at last. "Oh, if you had not come—you won't leave me?"

"No, never fear—*never* fear of my leaving you, sweet girl—my darling;" and as he spoke he felt the more rapid beating of her happy heart.

Miss Kirkwood was not seriously hurt, but had been stunned to insensibility. When the remainder of the party came up they found her reclining on a grassy knoll where Mr. Estill had gallantly spread his coat, as the warm sun had not yet dried the ground. Howard's horse stood close by, bearing evidence in his looks of having been violently exercised.

"Ho, there, what's up?" shouted Claycourt as he discovered the situation.

"Accident, don't you see! Miss Kirkwood's horse ran away—but she's all right now," Estill answered.

There was such a chatter of surprises and such a fire of interrogations for a minute or too that nobody succeeded in acquiring much information concerning the mishap. Olive tried several times

to explain, but was a good deal confused, just yet, and didn't feel any too strong, either.

"You don't say that horse ran away!" exclaimed Bessie Medlock; really, did he run?"

"No," replied Olive, looking at her piteously, "no—he flew!"

"Why didn't you hold him in?" queried Claycourt, looking down upon her in a stupid sort of astonishment.

"Now, look here, Claycourt, don't be a blanked idiot!" Estill blurted out, momentarily losing his patience.

In spite of this suggestive admonition there followed questions as to the whereabouts of the naughty horse, and wondering how they ever were going to get the unfortunate heroine home. Bessie Medlock was equal to the occasion. "It is only about two miles from here," she said; "I will walk, and Miss Kirkwood can take my horse."

This Miss Kirkwood objected to, of course, but Bessie said she "would just as lief walk as not, as she had often come out that far just rambling, and Miss Kirkwood would catch her death on the damp ground, and it would take too long to go home for a carriage."

When she finished there were very few objections left, and Claycourt concluded that he would enjoy a walk back, also.

Although the mounted party rode slowly, the

infantry showed no disposition to keep up, and was so late after the cavalcade in arriving at the village, that it was feared a rescuing band must be sent out.

"Major," asked Claycourt seriously, when they arrived at the Snowflake and found that the runaway horse had brought up, whole bones, at the stable, "what sort of fiery, undisciplined quadruped do you call that, anyway?"

"That," replied the major proudly, "is a Kentucky thoroughbred, and a racer from away back. Got a little broken down and short-winded for the track, so I put him in the livery. Intended to speak of it before you left, but knew *you* could ride anything with a back. He's a bird, ain't he?"

CHAPTER IX.

A PRACTICAL CONSULTATION.

MR. ESTILL'S feelings when he left the Snowflake that day were strange and conflicting. He had a hundred times more to think about than a few hours before; and all brought around by his exchange of horses with Olive Kirkwood at the gypsy camp. Was he regretful?

Howard could not even answer that question with entire satisfation to himself. So far as his heart was concerned, there was nothing that he could wish undone. Whatever doubt he felt was of the head—a question of whether he had acted wisely. Nothing could have been more accidental or impulsive. He had endeavored to believe that the love he felt for Olive was only a sudden infatuation, and that her fancy for him would scarce outlast the summer. When he knew that she was in peril, his whole nature was aroused, and when he thought her dead his agony taught him how dear she was to his heart.

His thoughts were busy not only about Olive, but about Mr. Kirkwood and his interesting invalid of a wife. There was more than curiosity

about them now. His forebodings, it must be admitted, were greatest when he contemplated the characteristics of his prospective mother-in-law. Judging from his observations thus far, he could not assert truthfully that she was exactly the sort of person he would have selected, out of free choice, for the relation, say, of grandmother to the children he might some day be blessed with. Nevertheless, other considerations. . . .

There was no use debating the question any longer, he must gain the confidence and good will of Mr. Kirkwood. In the absence of better prospects the scheme proposed by the volatile Mr. Claycourt seemed well nigh indispensable.

When he related the experiences of the morning to Florence and Mrs. Ordlaw he said nothing about his declaration of eternal fealty to Miss Kirkwood, but there was something in his words and manner that led them to suspect the truth.

The next person he met from the inn was Blake Harrell. He also was a person whom Howard desired to know more about, and accordingly set at work trying to draw him out. Mr. Harrell, who had not found Estill very chatty upon previous occasions, was half surprised to discover how conversable he could be when in the proper spirit. But Mr. Harrell was not as communicative as he was suave.

"I presume you have heard how Miss Kirkwood is this morning," Howard asked.

"Oh, yes, I believe Mr. Kirkwood said she was comfortable. It is such a delightful morning that I have been strolling since breakfast. I am very fond of walking in the country—strange how a city man who must ride if he has to go three squares will trudge for miles over a country road when he doesn't have to go anywhere."

"Vast difference in scene and atmosphere," replied Estell. "Ah, I presume Mrs. Kirkwood is feeling comfortable, too?"

"Indeed, I think probable — think I heard nothing unfavorable. You intend to spend the summer here, I presume?"

"No; only a few days longer. You are an old friend of the Kirkwoods', I imagine?"

"Not particularly—known them some time—pleasant family. Everybody knows Kirkwood."

"So it seems. Very popular man, I should suppose. Mrs. Kirkwood prominent society figure, I believe?"

"Well, I think she is," responded Mr. Harrell, as if he was not thoroughly familiar with the subject. "Unfortunate in way of ill-health, you observe. Claycourt's a capital fellow, eh?"

"First-rate chap, Floyd is. Don't know just how, but I got the idea when I came up here that you were related to the family."

"Oh, not remotely."

"So Claycourt told me. Impression caught

from seeing you on intimate terms with them, no doubt. You came over with them?"

"The same day, I believe. Heard it was a charming spot, and came to see. Not disappointed—though it grows somewhat monotonous during the day. You find it so, no doubt, eh?" And after ten minutes' conversation of similar tenor Estill knew about as much concerning Harrell's position toward the Kirkwoods as he did before.

He observed, too, in conversing with Olive that very little information was volunteered on that topic. Mrs. Kirkwood treated Harrell at times like a servant, and at other times as one whom she cherished the strongest esteem for. In spite of himself, Howard Estill felt an aversion toward the man, and instinctively questioned the honesty of his character.

A few days flew rapidly by. Miss Kirkwood recovered from the effects of her accident, and Mrs. Kirkwood grew more gracious to Howard when he called. It was fortunate that she thought well of him from the first meeting, for she had very little policy in the way of concealing her dislikes, which Estill subsequently discovered were by no means few.

Mr. Kirkwood was to return to the city. Howard decided upon going in his company. Someway he had not found a very convenient

opportunity for a confidential talk with him. This would be just the occasion for it.

After all the talk that he had indulged in about idleness and frivolity, it was really a very unpleasant thing for him to leave Ayresboro—just twice as much so now as it ever had been before.

Floyd had talked of taking a run back to the city, too, but upon discovering that Estill was calculating on talking business with his uncle, concluded to give him a clear field. Olive promised to go and see Florence frequently—and not to go riding again on Major Derryberry's broken-down racer. It rained the morning of departure, and that made it all the more depressing.

Mr. Kirkwood proved a very agreeable travelling companion. He had an abundance of excellent cigars, some reminiscences, and a whole volume on great enterprises. There were schemes for land syndicates, mining corporations, improvement companies, and loans, and refundings, and foreclosures, that made Mr. Kirkwood appear to be a very great operator, indeed!

"With the opportunities of this age, and the facilities and resources of this country, it seems as if every man of ability should accumulate a competence, if not wealth, in a few years," remarked Estill.

"True, true," replied Mr. Kirkwood. "But every man is not awake to the opportunities. That's the part of a genuine financier. Almost

any fellow can make money if some genius puts the chances right before him."

"Misfortune, or lack of training for business life, puts many at disadvantage, however," protested Howard; "my own case is an example of it."

"Oh, well, you're young yet," remarked Mr. Kirkwood, without appearing the least bit affected by Estill's plaintive hint.

"Of course, and at just the time of life to be doing something. Youth doesn't last always, and of what use are opportunities if they come when a man is ready for the grave."

"Umphe," assented Mr. Kirkwood. Not a particularly encouraging remark, but Estill continued—

"A man can never know what he is capable of till he has tried himself. I have often wondered just what I am good for—or rather what I am best for. Fact is, I've been somewhat the victim of circumstances—"

"How so?" asked Mr. Kirkwood, glancing at him keenly, as if he were not entirely satisfied as to that statement.

"All owing to the war," Estill replied; "you heard the story a few days ago."

Mr. Kirkwood admitted that the war had been a most disastrous calamity, a great destroyer and disorganizer. He did not expatiate much on the subject—snapped it off in short phrases. Estill

gradually worked himself into a talking mood, the great financier listening composedly and smoking continually. He didn't enter at first as much into the conversation as Howard could have wished, and the latter felt grave doubts whether he was making his case interesting.

Finally Estill finished, and paused to hear what comment Mr. Kirkwood might offer.

"Have another cigar," quoth that great man.

Estill felt somewhat disappointed, naturally enough, but was not in the mind to let the subject rest there.

"Thanks," he replied, lighting up, and assuming a more careless manner. "It isn't often that I take the trouble to talk like this, but I thought it a good plan to give you an outline of my position and hopes, considering the circumstances that have arisen during the past ten days. You know, Mr. Kirkwood, events often occur in the most unexpected manner—that is, the most unexpected events sometimes happen. I didn't suppose, when I came up over this road week before last, that upon going back I would find it my duty to inform you that your daughter Olive and I have formed a strong attachment for each other."

Mr. Kirkwood blew an unusual cloud of smoke off sideways, and nervously threw the stub of his cigar out of the window. Not a very disturbing demonstration, but yet quite enough to show that he was taken off his guard.

"It's something I hadn't expected to hear," he said.

"I need not say that I trust you are not displeased," Howard resumed. "Indeed, I did not suppose the intelligence would much surprise you. I pledge you my word as a gentleman, that I really strove to avoid this—this—attachment, as I did not feel that my position in the world, and prospects, warranted it. Miss Kirkwood is considerably younger than I am, and could not be expected to—to exercise much prudence, and—and it seems that I wasn't able to exercise enough for two."

Mr. Kirkwood did not smile here, but appeared seriously occupied.

"I should like to know if we have your benediction or your censure," continued Estill,

"Well, has it advanced as far as that?" asked Mr. Kirkwood.

"I think it has," Mr. Estill meekly admitted. "I have not asked her to be my wife—I should not deliberately have gone so far without asking your permission, or—or at least mentioning the matter to you. But we understand each other, and I consider myself pledged to her. It came about suddenly—as I said before, unexpectedly. That exexciting ride did it—I picked her up unconscious—I don't know exactly what I said before the others came up, but I said it, and I guess that settled it."

"I don't know that there is any very good cause for displeasure, Mr. Estill," said Mr. Kirkwood deliberately. "It has been my habit always to let my daughter do about as she pleased. She hasn't caused me any trouble so far, and if she thinks her happiness depends upon it, go ahead."

"Thank you," replied Howard. First point gained. After mentally crediting himself with the score he went on.

"Now that our relations are amicably established, I want to hear what advice you can offer me in the way of business. You occupy a high position, and control vast opportunities."

A-hem!" exclaimed Mr. Kirkwood somewhat ominously.

"Don't misapprehend me," said Howard quickly. "Whatever I get in this world I want to earn. You'll find me independent enough, Mr. Kirkwood."

"Oh, that's all right, that's all right, my boy. I was just thinking—perhaps I might do something for you. Ever had any experience in banking"...

"No."

"Insurance?"

"No."

"Real-estate?"

"No."

"Railroading?"

"No."

"Prospecting?"

"No."

"Loans, discounts?"

"No."

"The devil!" quietly ejaculated Mr. Kirkwood, and dropped his head in despair. "You haven't got much to unlearn, have you?"

"Strong recommendation, isn't it?" asked Howard. "I am glad there's some symptom of consolation about it. But that little catechism may make me appear a bigger ignoramus than I really am. Technically considered, I answered truthfully to every count, but they are not all Chinese to me, either. I learned bookkeeping on a Mississippi steamboat, looked into law a little when I was chasing my lost inheritance. . . . "

"Ahem!" (Mr. Kirkwood had a habit of doing this effectively sometimes.)

"Yes, and have looked over records enough to get an inkling of conveyances. Not to mention various odd things that I'm generally credited with being handy at."

"Yes, Claycourt mentioned a few of them to me," remarked Mr. Kirkwood, remembering his nephew's enthusiastic praise of Estill's ability in writing sonnets and tying scarfs.

"I fear Floyd was a little premature in bringing me to your attention, Mr. Kirkwood. He's goodhearted, and evidently takes a genuine interest in

me, though I don't want you to think I abetted him in his designs."

"Oh, no, no, his influence is not ponderous, anyway. But what do you think you could learn to do?"

"Anything in the range of business," answered Estill, promptly.

"Well, that sounds assuring," said Mr. Kirkwood.

"I don't calculate on having to learn every detail—I imagine that I have sense enough to comprehend some things at a glance."

"Better still."

"And as to that, I'm not seeking for the care of small details—I want something of wider scope."

This seemed to please Mr. Kirkwood more than any thing he had said yet. "That's right," he exclaimed. "There are a thousand men for details where there is one for broad-gauge enterprise. It's possible you may be among the units. If you are, I shall have more than room enough for you, but—have you, eh, any means at all at your command?"

"Perhaps a hundred or so. Oh, I'm usually in easy circumstances financially," remarked Estill dryly.

"So it seems—about enough for a day," said Kirkwood in a soliloquizing manner.

"When I wish to appear opulent, I speak of my plantation in Alabama," added Estill, "but

it's so ghastly sterile that they hardly assess it for taxes."

"Why don't you plat it and sell it off in town lots?"

"Bless you, there an't a town within twenty miles of it."

"So much the better—build one and have a monopoly."

"Where would I get the dear people?" asked Estill.

"Send up a balloon," replied Mr. Kirkwood with the true instinct of a "boom" organizer. "Invent any kind of fake to nail the attention of the gaping multitude, and they are your cattle," added this great financial authority, with more force than feeling.

It didn't strike very pleasantly upon Estill's sympathies, and he had a secret hope that all business was not conducted upon such brutal principles. Nevertheless, he smiled, and said that might be so.

"It *is* so," insisted Mr. Kirkwood, "and let me impress that fact upon you at the start. Take it for your first lesson, and if you learn it thoroughly the rest will come like tricks to a monkey. You will mount high upon the ladder of success."

Howard paid close attention to these admonitions of wisdom, as they fell from the lips of this much-emulated man of affairs, and made no reply. But in his heart he felt that he would rather halt

somewhere near the middle rounds, and retain a little more regard for humankind.

"Now, this is an age of development," Mr. Kirkwood went on to say. "My success lies in the encouragement of it, in the directing of capital, and the promotion of enterprise. Perhaps the next generation will see the country controlled by corporations and combinations—looks that way from my present point of view. Doubtless the next generation will also have ten millionaires where there is one now. See any connection?"

Estill said he thought he did.

"Of course you do," Mr. Kirkwood continued. "A shrewd observer can't miss it. Now, that being the case, what should a financier do? Shape his policy to the tendency of the times. A few men get rich—amass millions by the slow process of gradual accumulations. The possibilities in that direction are few. My boy, the possibilities in the way of organizing and promoting great joint-stock companies are practically unlimited. The nation is recovering from the shock of war, immigration is pouring in, natural resources are vast! What's going to happen? A great revival of general business. That means production of wealth—but that's not our harvest—oh, no! Production of wealth means general prosperity—for a time. That leads to an era of speculation—and *there* we are, my boy. Speculation! Great rises in values! Great systems of railroads to be built!

Fabulous returns for small investments—that's the great card, my boy! Great profits from small investments! Then the public grows clamorous, and there *must* be competent organizers to provide opportunities. The public *may* be benefited—the organizer and promoter has a dead sure thing! You see the situation?"

"Well, yes. Your foresight is no doubt keen. But I think the days for John Laws, and South Sea schemes are past," remarked Howard, a little dubiously.

"Perhaps they are," admitted Mr. Kirkwood promptly. "But the days when men are feverish for a snap, don't you know—something soft and yielding—are just as bright and propitious now as ever they were. There are a thousand mines to be developed, a thousand towns to be built, a hundred railroads to be constructed! There are territories to be peopled, manufactories to be established! There are valuable forests in Honduras, and coffee plantations in Brazil; guano beds in Peru, and sugar plantations in the Sandwich Islands! Are these all to be taken care of by individual capital? Impossible! It will be done by joint-stock concerns—corporations! The joint-stock company is the coming power! The plan is beautiful! They will control commerce and speculation alike!"

"I am inclined to agree with you," Estill re-

marked, as Kirkwood paused to refresh himself with a swallow of tonic.

"You can't help it. Now, what does the man of brains and energy propose to do about it? Take advantage of it, of course—promptly get into line—adapt himself to the growing circumstances. Last year I projected a building fund association—half a million capital. Put in my abilities, placed the stock properly, got myself elected president of the company, now control the shares—those who an't satisfied let go and fall out. Works beautifully, you see. Just mention this for an instance. Have subscriptions open now for stock in a coal company in Indiana, and a zinc furnace in Missouri. Bring in ready money. After first dividends we make another issue of stock—see the possibilities?"

Estill listened to this enthusiastic lecture upon finance and enterprise till he became convinced that his future father-in-law was a very sharp man, both in his ideas and methods. And although it was not all quite as he had supposed it to be, the prospects to which Mr. Kirkwood pointed were very alluring. He always dreaded drudgery. He would be relatively free from it in this promising field, where fluency of speech, affability of manners and faith-inspiring address were chief requisites.

The following week he had a desk in Mr. Kirkwood's elegantly-appointed office.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHARACTERS AND THE DIALOGUE.

Mr. KIRKWOOD'S place of business was very imposing. There was much beveled plate glass and solid furniture. The windows were wide, and richly adorned with large letters in gold, forming the magic words, "Bonds, Stocks, Mortgage, Banker, Investment Securities," etc.

Howard Estill felt, it must be admitted, that he had taken a very important step upward when he found himself installed therein, with a comfortable salary assured him, and a promise of shares in certain incomes—as soon as they began to be realized: the prospects being favorable.

There were hundreds of other offices on the street, similar in appearance, bearing pretty much the same legends upon their windows; and a great many more to be seen upon other streets. Estill had never taken very much notice of them before—they all go to make up streets. But when he became interested in the occupation, he was led to wonder whence the business to sustain all these expensive offices was obtained, and from what sources the profits really emanated. None

of them created anything—there was no actual production.

Indeed, it must be a great financial centre he was in, Mr. Estill thought. Not without reason.

Howard gathered experience, from close observation, quite rapidly. Stocks and bonds became more of an open book to him. And mortgages! —well, after getting an insight into that department, it did not seem as if there could be a strip of earth anywhere in this free and progressive country, cemeteries and Kansas included, that did not have a formidable encumbrance recorded against it!

It is not certain whether such things exert any effect in particular upon love-making, but all combined made Howard Estill quite a busy man. Olive and her mamma returned from Ayresboro early in September, Mrs. Kirkwood somewhat disappointed, of course, with the benefits derived from the waters, whose effects hardly justified the glowing recommendations contained in Major Derryberry's prospectus. However, the invalid's disposition was somewhat improved, and that was of paramount importance.

Olive was happy to be in the city again. Howard, who had taken occasional trips to the mountain resort during the summer, delighted in observing that she constantly grew more beautiful, more loveable; which of course she did not so much, except in his fervid imagination. Their

engagement pleased Mrs. Kirkwood. To be sure she chided Olive not a little for being such an enthusiastic little dunce, and for her enraptured devotion, which she assumed to tolerate as girlish folly, and lightly to commiserate.

Nevertheless, Howard compelled her respect. She found him interesting, and was fond of crediting him with not being so tiresomely commonplace as most men.

"Isn't he brilliant!" Olive would exclaim rapturously.

"Oh, it's not that," her mamma would reply complacently. "He doesn't strive for effect—and above all doesn't try to be amusing. If men only knew how utterly ridiculous they make themselves when they try to be funny!—but of course they don't, stupid creatures!"

It was to be marvelled at that she seldom ventured any of her sarcasm upon him—possibly because he did not afford her as good opportunity as most men. When Howard declared a thing was right, Mrs. Kirkwood usually subscribed to the opinion. That was what surprised Mr. Kirkwood! If Howard was inclined to be in serious mood, Mrs. Kirkwood would not ruthlessly accuse him of trying to cultivate an interesting air of melancholy. She didn't scoff at his sentiment, what there was of it, and, indeed, in a word, was quite well satisfied with the addition to her family of a young man of graceful manners, and

distinguished appearance. She might have included his intelligence, also, but that was a tertiary consideration.

Whether Estill was equally pleased with Mrs. Kirkwood, may easily be doubted. He could not readily get rid of his first impressions. He disliked artificial people. But he consoled himself in some degree with the thought that she did not grow worse upon more intimate acquaintance. In more than one respect she was a mystery to him. He could not avoid sympathizing with her when she complained of wretched pains and nervousness, as she did usually, *but it was a question* with him, just how much she deserved it.

And then there was Blake Harrell. . . .

Now there was a person that Estill finally made up his mind to hate. He seldom called at the Kirkwood mansion that he did not find Harrell there, or just coming away; or that he had just been there. Not unfrequently he took Mrs. Kirkwood to drive, when Mr. Kirkwood was so closely occupied; and when they went to the opera, Harrell was pretty sure to visit their box during the evening.

One day he said to Claycourt—"Look here, Floyd, I wish you'd tell me what you think of that fellow Harrell! I must admit that he's somewhat of a conundrum to me. He bothers me."

"Oh, Harrell an't bad, only"—

"Only what?"

"Why, I guess he's been a little in love with my aunt, that's all."

"That's *all!*" exclaimed Estill.

"Yes. Damned fool, of course, to get dizzy over a married woman, but you know there's no accounting for such things."

Howard was doubly surprised—first, to discover a disagreeable something that he had for sometime tried to keep himself from suspecting, and secondly, to see how perfectly indifferent Claycourt appeared about it.

"I should think Watson Kirkwood would kick him from his house," he muttered.

"Oh, dear boy, that would be an awful mistake! Think of a dozen newspapers writing it up the next day and exaggerating it a thousand per cent—what a delicate little society scandal that would make, wouldn't it?"

"Well, there are enough other ways to dispose of him—snub him—give him a cold cut!—I will!"

"Come, it's nothing to care for. Uncle Wat doesn't even deign to notice it. And Aunt—why, she laughs at him. He amuses her. You know, that aunt of mine is an out-and-out attractive woman, if she has been an invalid a dozen years. Bless your soul, old chap, this ain't the first fellow that's been struck with her—society mashes, you know!"

"It's not quite according to my ideas," remarked Estill.

"Ah, what's the good of being puritanical! Don't you know half the married women in society have their special admirers?—sure. The more conquests the more they are envied. Ha, ha, Harrell will get over it soon enough—I imagine Aunt is growing tired of him already."

All that *might* be true, Howard admitted; but there was a great deal of difference between having a distant admirer, and one that . . . . Anyway, it was all wrong!

That was the only conclusion that Estill could arrive at, whichever way he argued. For several days he pondered over it, wondering if it was his duty to take any action in the matter; and if so, just what he should do. He had never pretended to being a very stern moralist . . . and then he fell to soliloquizing, as to how a circumstance like this might have affected him before he had fallen in love with Olive Kirkwood. Supposing Claycourt had told him of Harrell's admiration for Mrs. Kirkwood before he had known any of the family—would he have been quite so much disturbed over the disgraceful aspect of the case as he was now? Curious conundrum. Supposing any gay-hearted club man had incidentally remarked to him three months before, that married women, in fashion or out of it, delighted in making conquests—would it have sounded as scanda-

lous to him as now? Another curious conundrum.

Howard was frank enough with himself to admit, that in all probability he would not have been very much shocked at the intelligence—possibly not more than Claycourt was now. That being so, it was interesting to contemplate the change in his moral, or spiritual, or sentimental, nature—which was it? Moral, no doubt; and what was the cause of it? Unquestionably, the love of a pure and innocent girl. If Olive Kirkwood had so refined his ethical sensibilities, he must admit that there was something of a heavenly nature in the influence of woman's love.

One day, soon after his conversation with Claycourt, he remarked to Olive—"I suppose you have noticed that I treat Harrell with unusual coolness?"

"Yes."

"Well—I don't suppose it annoys you any?"

"No—*that* doesn't. But I am pained that you should think there is any cause for disliking him."

"Perhaps I'm getting finnicky about such things as I grow old," he said carelessly; "but I can't help it. I wish he would stop coming here."

"I know—you fear there will be remarks made about it. Well, you know poor mamma was always a favorite in society, and has commanded

such a great deal of attention, that—that no one takes any notice of it."

"Likely enough," Howard replied.

"And everybody knows Blake Harrell. He hasn't anything to do but play the gallant, and he's been coming to our house for so long. Anyway, I don't think we see him now as often as awhile back."

"I wish you would snub him entirely," said Howard bluntly.

"It would be so embarrassing to do that. Why not let him alone, till—till after. . . "

"Till after we are married? Very well—don't worry about what I have said. A fellow takes a dislike, you know, sometimes; and I can't very well conceal it in this case."

As he left the house he fell in with a man with whom he had formed a passing acquaintance at the club—a gossipy sort of fellow, who knew a great many people, likewise their weaknesses. Or at least he imagined he did, which, for *practical* puposes, was just as bad.

"Living in this neigborhood, eh?" asked the club man.

"No—just calling."

"Ah," said the club man, glancing back at the stone fronts, "at the McKennellses?—elegant family."

"No—at Kirkwood's."

"Ah, yes, Kirkwood's, to be sure. Watson

Kirkwood's. Very popular man. Known him a good many years—always liked him. Has a very stylish wife—her name's been familiar in society for years—stunning woman."

"Very pleasant lady," replied Howard.

"Oh, yes, yes—and very attractive," continued the male gossip, as they walked down the avenue. "Very attractive—never lacks attention. Getting along in middle life now, but she has been a belle in her day. And she isn't out of it yet. Know Harrell?—Blake Harrell? Fellows say he's dead captivated with her—talked about a good deal. Rather odd for a *roué* like Harrell—but of course he isn't a fool. Shouldn't wonder if . . ."

"I beg your pardon, my dear sir," interrupted Howard; "I am quite conversant with their family affairs. I am in partnership with Mr. Kirkwood, and his daughter's engagement to me has been announced some time. Good day."

Howard entered a stage, and left the club gossip standing on the pavement, looking as if he had just suffered a stroke of idiocy.

That was exactly the sort of talk that Estill had dreaded. There was only one thing to be done. He would speak with Mr. Kirkwood about it, and if necessary inform him just how the case stood.

Mr. Kirkwood was not a little surprised when Howard broached the subject. "It's the worst nonsense I've heard of since I've been married,"

he exclaimed, his manner indicating that the assertion implied a good deal. "But, bless you, my boy, we'll stop it! Damn these idle numbskulls—haven't they any sense! I suppose Edna has been rather too free with Harrell—but it's her way. She wouldn't be happy if there wasn't some one around to flatter her, and I've never been much of a hand for that myself."

"I would not wish to question her prudence," continued Howard, "but I am convinced that Harrell is not a man that you should have admitted to your house on such intimate terms. Within the past few days I have heard some things about him that are exceedingly uncomplimentary, to draw it the mildest."

"Why—he hasn't been talking, has he?" inquired Mr. Kirkwood with a good deal of temper.

"I would not care to answer that in the affirmative," said Estill. "In fact, it has been a very disagreeable duty for me to mention the subject at all. But I think that I can say, without doing him any injustice, that he lacks the honor of a gentleman."

Mr. Kirkwood didn't say anything more to Howard, but Hopson is said to have let it out, that there was a little scene when he arrived in the bosom of his family that evening. And the fact that Mrs. Kirkwood was "worse" the next day—that is, was prostrated, as customary after

unusual excitement or expenditure of energy, tended to substantiate the hint.

It was soon whispered about, too, that Blake Harrell and Mr. Kirkwood had had a misunderstanding, some said about business (accompanying the remark with a smirk of incredulity), and some others said — well, it would only be giving currency to unworthy gossip to relate what some others did say.

At any rate, there was something to talk about. Howard Estill did not hear very much of it, but he felt instinctively that it was going on.

For some weeks Lawyer Murchison had not been heard from. During three or four months immediately following his first appearance, he had called frequently upon Howard, each time with the assurance that he had made a new and startling discovery relating to the lost heritage, but which flattened out to nothing at all, after Howard had looked into it. This grew to be a good deal of a nuisance, especially as Mr. Murchison did not possess an engaging personality, always carried an accumulated odor of tobacco around with him, and was exceedingly tedious in his garrulity. In fact, Lawyer Murchison was a typical old fraud, and Howard finally determined to suppress him altogether.

But one morning Mr. Murchison turned up at Mr. Kirkwood's offices, and desired so see Mr. Estill.

"Tell him that I'm busy, and don't want to see him," was Howard's blunt instruction to the messenger. In a moment the boy returned and began—

"Mr. Murchison says tell you it's unusually important information—"

"Say to him that I've had quite enough of his 'important information,' and don't wish to be interrupted again!"

Estill supposed that would settle it for all time; but in the next mail came a letter from the insuppressible lawyer:

"Your action, in refusing to receive me, after I had taken the pains of calling, does not seem to me quite professional or business-like," began Mr. Murchison reprovingly, "and is not such as a client owes to the dignity of his counsellor. I wish you to call and consult me at once. You will doubtless see that it is to your interest to do so, when I inform you that I have come into possession of certain documents, relics of Walker Sticey, recently of Sing Sing; ex-alderman and attorney at law—now dead."

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Estill in surprise; and at that moment Mr. Kirkwood entered his room.

"Something unusual, eh?" asked the head of the house, his sharp instincts ever alert to know what was transpiring.

"Unusual—and amusing," replied Estill. "I

spoke to you once about a superannuated apology for a lawyer who has been tagging me about my lost inheritance—I bluffed him off, and now he writes that he has papers once belonging to a fellow named Sticey—a wretch that I once had employed in the matter, but who afterwards broke into Sing Sing by the aldermanic route—embezzlement of city funds, or something of that sort. Dead now."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Mr. Kirkwood.

"Did you know him?"

"Know him!—knew of him—one of a set of public swindlers—great blessing when every one of them is gone!"

"That's right," assented Howard. "And this fellow Murchison—"

"Murchison, did you say?"

"Yes; Brice Murchison. Know anything of him?"

"No. Same ilk, perhaps. Don't let him bleed you for a cent, my boy—not for a cent. Better pay no attention to him. Don't allow yourself to be led in an expensive chase after a phantom!" Mr. Kirkwood sank down on a couch as he spoke.

"I gave that up some time ago, as I told you," replied Estill. "But I *would* like to know how this old Insect has managed to work into Sticey's papers. Not that they are likely to prove of any value—"

"As a matter of curiosity they—ah, will you get me a glass of brandy, my boy, immediately, in my locker—"

"Why, yes—are you feeling ill?" And Howard made a nimble move for the liquor without waiting for reply. When Mr. Kirkwood had swallowed a liberal dose, Howard repeated his question.

"Yes; I have not been first-rate for some time—heart acting a little queer. There, sit down—I'm all right now. Don't think it's very alarming, but doctors don't give me much satisfaction about it."

"Mrs. Kirkwood confided to me that you had a little trouble of that sort now and then," Howard remarked, "but I had not seen any indication of it. Hope you won't let it grow upon you. Perhaps you had better be quiet to-day—"

"Yes; think I will. I'll rest here a minute, and then drive home. I had several things in mind—you can probably attend to them: See about renewal of mortgage on that Chicago hotel; insert advertisements for bids on those Denver bonds; see Mangler & Co. about that Michigan canal subscription; make them take fifty thousand, at least. And—ah, you're after the Erie people with that narrow-gauge project?

"Oh, yes—yes."

"That's right, my boy, don't let up on them a minute!"

Mr. Kirkwood was not seen again at his place of

business that day, nor the next. Howard was constantly occupied with more things than he could well take care of, and during the remainder of the week gave very little serious thought to Lawyer Murchison, his injured feelings, or mysterious documents.

Then Christmas came, and according to his promise, given in the summer, he went to Ayresboro to spend the holiday with Florence and the Ordlaws. While on the train he fell to wondering just what sort of papers the cunning old counsellor might have furbished up. "I'm sorry I didn't have time to go and see him before I left," he soliloquized, "if only to have something to tell Florence. But he will no doubt keep without further decay till I get back."

Ayresboro was a very different-looking place now from what it was with its summer plumes on. There was snow, snow, everywhere. The ravines were full of it, the house-tops were covered with it, the lanes were drifted almost to obliteration with it. Winter was upon Ayresboro, and picturesque solitude was now its most distinguishing feature. Major Derryberry's big hotel was closed—when night came it was dark and gloomy, except for the lights that shone from the few rooms he occupied with his own family. The major was employing his time in literary labors —composing glittering prospectuses for the next season.

But in spite of ice and snow-drifts, Mrs. Ordlaw's cottage was snug and inviting. Lot had great storm-doors up, and never permitted the big stoves to lack fuel. The pleasing prospects of summer were now bleak indeed, as viewed from the half-frosted windows, but the little rooms were warm and snug, and in spite of storms and wailing winds there was a feeling of security within.

Christmas arrived the next day after Estill. About the first thing he did the next morning was to go down to the post-office and receive from Olive (twenty-four hours after leaving her) a letter fourteen pages long; but written in such a space-consuming, angular hand that it didn't amount to much, after all—in the way of quantity, of course. The day was bright and crisp, and the reflection of the sun upon the limitless expanse of snow was almost blinding. Howard wore blue eyeglasses, and when he returned to the cottage complained about the glare bringing the freckles out so noticeably upon his face.

Christmas dinner was a very jolly one. Bessie Medlock was invited, and came over early. Rilly was out coasting all morning, but came in, with snapping eyes and rosy-red cheeks, in time to help pare apples for the kitchen. After which she slipped a small icicle down Howard's back, and thereby precipitated a romp that ultimately in-

volved everybody else, and came near turning the whole house topsy-turvy.

Three o'clock came and Howard began to complain of being ravenous. He remarked that he knew Miss Medlock was, too, for she was growing restless. Bessie had been walking around a good deal and glancing out of the window frequently; but still she protested that she wasn't the least bit hungry, and begged Mrs. Ordlaw and Ellen to take all the time they needed—there wasn't any need of hurrying on her account.

Howard said the afternoon train would soon be in, and he expected an important business letter; and couldn't think of going for it as starved as he was; but this anxiety about *business* letters was too transparent to deceive anybody.

"There it comes, now," he exclaimed, as a shrill whistle was heard.

"And dinner will be ready in a minute," replied Aunt Ordlaw—which it was.

"I'm sure I don't know what makes Bessie so quiet and reserved," remarked Florence, as they assembled around the table.

"Really, nothing at all," Bessie replied, smiling innocently; "or at most it can't be more than the calm after that little tempest we had."

"Rather guess I could tell who she's thinking about," said Howard with a roguish look. "Never mind, my girl—perhaps by another Christmas

there won't be such a distance between you, ha, ha."

"Oh, hush, I wasn't thinking of anything of the kind," protested Bessie, which was not an unblushing falsehood, by any means.

Rap, rap, rap! came briskly upon the door. "My, *who* can that be?" exclaimed Bessie, with peculiar anxiety.

"Sure enough—rather odd time for callers," said Howard, despondent over the prospect of another delay of dinner. He opened the door, and in burst—Floyd Claycourt.

"Welcome, my boy—glad to see you," exclaimed Howard.

"Ha, ha, how do, old chap," shouted Floyd, grasping his hand. "Ha, ha, didn't expect me, of course?—how do, Mrs. Ordlaw—how do, Miss Florence, awful glad to see you, upon my word, I am! Pardon my dropping in upon you this way—why, bless my heart, here's Miss Medlock!—how do, Miss Bessie—delighted to see you, too—shake both hands—you're looking blooming—didn't expect me at all, did you?—no, why should you. This is just too jolly—and here's Rilly—shake hands, my little chum, wait till I get out of this great coat—it's warm in here—and I'll give you a kiss—there—ha, ha, feel almost like kissing everybody—how awfully jolly!"

After Mr. Claycourt had somewhat exhausted the exuberance of his jollity, the others got a

chance to say something, and Howard took occasion to admonish him that dinner would get cold soon.

All were delighted at his appearance—nothing else could have created such a flutter of merriment.

"Why, how did you happen to come?" inquired Bessie, apparently recovering from speechless surprise.

"Does seem odd, doesn't it?" replied Claycourt rattling on in his customary manner. "Well, you see I was down at Washington attending to a little business—intended to get back to New York this morning, but learned Howard had come over here, and thought I'd come too. May be late for dinner, says I, when I looked at the time-table, but I'll take my chances and surprise 'em. Splendid scheme—train came near being late, but I'm just in time, an't I?—happy luck!"

"What in the world is this?" exclaimed Rilly, looking at a piece of green paper that she picked up from the floor. "It says—'Be sure and come—will try and keep dinner waiting till four-o'clock train is in,' and signed by Bessie Medlock."

Bessie gave a slight scream, and made a dash for the paper.

"Lord bless me!" exclaimed Claycourt, confused, "it must have fallen out of my pocket."

A volley of laughter followed this awkward disclosure, that caused Claycourt to grow crimson

down to his finger tips, and Miss Medlock to escape from the room. Howard soon induced her to return, however, admitting to her that it must be a mistake and . . .

"It's all your fault, you awkward fellow," she said to Claycourt, half-hysterically.

"Yes, I know it was very stupid of me to lose your telegram, of course, but—but I got here on time, didn't I?"

After more laughter, everybody said it was perfectly splendid of Bessie to arrange such a delightful surprise, and Mrs. Ordlaw thanked her in a motherly way for having Mr. Claycourt come, and Estill proposed a toast to her, which was drunk with genuine apple cider.

The dinner was sumptuous and the merriment did not lag for a moment. The pleasant jingle of sleigh-bells was frequently heard, and joyous laughter furnished the music within.

In the evening they played games like children, and took turns at popping corn and cracking nuts.

"Talk about genuine pleasure," exclaimed Claycourt, "why, I haven't had so much since I was a boy! Never knew what people could do in the country to amuse themselves. Glad I've learned. But fact is, did come near disappointing you. Heard yesterday at Washington that my poor aunt was worse again, and didn't know but I ought to go back home."

Estill was looking over the morning paper,

which Lot had brought from the post-office (together with another letter from Olive), and remarked—"She *was* pretty poorly yesterday, but I see here a description of her elegant toilet at the opera last night—decolleté, pearl necklace, and that sort of thing."

"What, last night! Well, by Jove, she was;" exclaimed Claycourt, glancing at the paper; "well, that dear aunt of mine is a wonder! Did you *ever* know a woman with such remarkable talents, old chap?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE WAYS OF FINANCE, LOVE AND VENGEANCE.

ONE of the first things that Estill did when he returned to New York was to call upon Mr. Murchison. He had the address in the note the lawyer had written to him, but even then experienced not a little difficulty in finding the place. It was not in a quarter most inhabited by lawyers; lettered signs of professional men did not glitter upon the walls and stairways, and there was no ornate office-directory at the entrance.

It was in a dingy old building, on an insignificant street, occupied mainly by people engaged in the grocery and vegetable trades. A fish dealer had the ground floor—nobody disputed that. There was not the least chance of any one forgetting his presence in the neighborhood. Howard found a narrow staircase, dark and creaky, and in a most discouraging state of repair, with a sort of infernal machine in the way of a trap-door half way up, hung with a weight, that led the unwary to believe a landing was there. In discovering his mistake the unwary usually sprained an ankle, or dislocated some other joint in his anatomy.

Howard began to ascend, groping his way through the heavy odor that had a permanent position as advertising agent for the fish dealer. Being of athletic physique he escaped through the trap with only a bruised thumb, and at the top of the first flight stumbled into a tobacco factor's den. The man did not know anything about Murchison—he might be further up.

Howard took the next flight. Here the odor, mingling with its second-floor neighbor, became somewhat neutralized, but still performed its proper functions. The staircase was narrower and dingier, and by the gradual changes of scent Howard knew that he was coming upon a stock of green coffee.

The man among the coffee sacks didn't know Murchison, either—he might be further up.

Then the stair became steep-winding and fearfully rheumatic, and the odor decidedly composite in its structure, with rank symptoms of dried fruits for local coloring. After bumping about till he had nearly lost breath and patience, Howard arrived at his self-appointed counsellor's office. Fortunately, as he thought, Mr. Murchison was in. His surroundings were simple. He had a small pine table, a waste-basket that served also for cuspidor, and two rickety chairs. On the wall was a court-calendar, with blank spaces under a heading "Cases for next Term," from which dangled a spider's web.

Estill was surprised to find Mr. Muchison exceedingly busy. The "Old Insect" did not even take time to greet him very cordially, but kept on pretending to write.

"I came up to see about those Sticey documents," said Howard, in short breaths, helping himself to the vacant rickety chair.

"I'll talk with you in just a minute," replied Muchison, writing very noisily. Howard waited, and recovered his breath.

"Now, sir," said the lawyer, fumbling some papers ostentatiously, "I'm at your service."

"All I want is to know what sort of papers those are that you claim to have of Sticey's, and how you got them."

"Ah—a-h'm—yes, I remember. I believe I sent you a communication to that effect. Well—ah'm—my clerk is out just at present, and has the key to the case where my valuable papers are kept. But—ahem—I believe there has been no specific engagement—that is, ahem—I have not been regularly retained by you in this case?"

"Why, no"—

"In that event, I could hardly disclose the nature of the information I hold," interrupted Murchison.

"Oh, you can't?" said Howard, somewhat sneeringly.

"Certainly not. It would be unprofessional, quite unprofessional, sir! It takes brains to dis-

cover these facts—a professional man's brains are his capital, sir!"

"I suppose that means, you want a retainer-fee?"

"Exactly—a retainer-fee of one hundred dollars."

"Look here, Murchison," exclaimed Howard, "you can't make me dance to any such music as that! I've been worked that way before, and understand the scheme!"

"Oh, very well—I'm not particular," answered Murchison, with an air of confidence and indifference that Estill hardly expected.

"What do you know about Sticey, any way," Howard asked.

"I must decline to answer all questions till my terms are complied with," replied Murchison.

"Say, do you suppose I'm such an innocent, as to come up here, to an out-of-the-way den like this, and give up a hundred dollars to a creature like you, till I know pretty well what I'm going to get for it? If you do, you show your ignorance of human nature."

"I'm not insisting upon it, am I?" snapped Murchison.

"Likely enough because you know it wouldn't do you any good. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll make an agreement here in writing, to pay you a fee double what you ask if you first convince me that you have any letters or other

documents of Walker Sticey's, bearing directly upon the Estill estate."

"Well—ahem," faltered Mr. Murchison, evidently not having anticipated a proposition like that.

"Do you take me?" demanded Howard.

"Well, ahem, such an entirely unprofessional action." . . .

"Murchison, you old skeesics, I think you're a humbug, and not a very clever one at that," blurted out Estill, "and I want never to hear any more of you! If ever you come nagging at me again—well, I may lose my temper, remember that!"

Estill wended his way down the tortuous and effluviated staircase, and chided himself for having ever committed the folly of climbing up.

He was kept so busy at assisting Mr. Kirkwood in the multitude of important plans and projects which the enterprising financier was promoting, that after a very few days his thoughts hardly ever reverted to Murchison. There was great enthusiasm in the business. Mr. Kirkwood inspired every clerk in the establishment with great ardor and emulation. Howard soon discovered himself partaking of the bold operator's influence. True, many of his grandest enterprises were still to be developed, but even the glowing possibilities were invigorating.

In the midst of all this activity, and hope, and

excitement, Estill began to see things that disturbed him. A certain corporation organized in Wyoming to conduct a ranch business on a large scale, came to grief from some inexplicable cause, and a large number of unlucky shareholders did not hesitate to accuse Watson Kirkwood, who had manipulated the capital stock, with having quite as much to do with the wrecking as with the organization of the concern. Some of the newspapers had rather sensational articles about it, but Mr. Kirkwood was unfluttered; and after anybody had talked with him five minutes on the subject he was quite ready to believe the accusations wholly unjust.

But that was not all. The great financier had been active in promoting a colonization scheme in Costa Rica. There was a touch of mutual-benefit allurement in the plan, and the inducements pictured to the public were of the most tempting sort. The homeless were all to have houses and lands, poverty was to be unknown, and life was to be one of luxurious ease in a climate where nature needed very little assistance to supply all human requirements. Rich forests of cabinet and dye woods and luxuriant productions of rarest tropical fruits were among the inexhaustible sources of wealth. Gorgeous illustrations accompanied the text.

Several dozen families had invested their little all in the scheme and packed off hopefully to the

wonderful land of promise, while there were favorable prospects of catching a great many more. This was the condition of the enterprise when Estill came upon the scene. He had heard of colonization enterprises and co-operation communities, and was naturally skeptical. He said to Kirkwood that he didn't entirely like the looks of it all.

"There's no flaw in it, my boy," replied the senior member. "There's little or no element of risk, and dead sure gain. We have a contract with the government, or what passes for one down there, for two hundred dollars a head for every man or woman we induce to settle in the country and stay two years. We have a contract for land enough for a commonwealth at twenty-five cents an acre. That is sold to our dear colonists at four dollars an acre. Cheap enough to them, an't it? Where can they buy valuable timber or fruit lands in this country for that money? If they stay there, as most of them will have to do, they will need supplies—machinery and all kinds of goods. We can't be expected to furnish them without a profit, eh?"

Mr. Kirkwood's confidence in the financial success of the enterprise for the originators of it seemed well enough founded, but Howard was not entitely satisfied yet.

"What surety has the colonist that the country is all you represent it?" he asked.

"Surety! Lord bless you—he goes down and investigates," replied Mr. Kirkwood.

"Yes, and takes his family, and spends his money; and there he is, whether he finds what he expected or not."

"In that case, he is very likely to remain two years," said Mr. Kirkwood, with a shrug. "And of course we hope they find it healthy, for dead ones don't count."

It was somewhat of a coincidence, but that very day Estill happened down near the Battery, and saw a lank individual trudging along with an air betokening calamities and sorrows without end. He walked a trifle unsteadily, carried a carpet-bag of antique design, which appeared to have space inside to let; wore a "hickory" shirt, a tattered hat, and negligé trousers. Evidently he had just disembarked.

Howard discovered something familiar about him, and the odd individual, struck by a countenance that *he* had seen before, halted and stared back in confusion.

"Rather guess I've seen you somewhar afore," he drawled out.

"Well, I rather guess," replied Howard, placing his man the moment he heard him speak; "Prosperity Jelks—Cheep Store—how is business up at Rose Valley?"

"Law, young feller, you've got me," replied

Mr. Jelks, more confused than ever. "Now whar on airth—"

"Don't know me, eh? Well, no wonder—we never got very well acquainted. I'm the man who came to your place last summer looking for the negro, Zeb. And a pretty snipe-hunt that black rascal took me on. But where the deuce have you been?"

Mr. Jelks dropped his carpet-sack, stuck both hands in his pockets, and delivered himself up to eloquence.

"You talk about snipe-hunts, do yer! Waal, I've been on the condemndest, all-firedest one that ever a smart man tuk to! I'm free ter say that I kin take the belt fer darn-foolism when it comes to rushin' off half-cocked fer glory."

"Indeed, I wouldn't think it," answered Howard.

"Thet's the way I feel, anyhow. I've been on a prospectin' tower in thet infernal region uv Costy Reeky—"

"Ah, in Costa Rica, eh?"

"Yaas, sumwhar in Central Ameriky, I guess; anyhow it's 'way out er sight uv any civilization, an' I should say considerably over the border frum God's country."

"Why, didn't you find it all right?"

"My friend, it's the rankest, infernalest damned fraud that any man ever had the gosh-darned luck ter light onto. Jest look at this yer thrillin' pros-

pectus"—and Mr. Jelks produced one of Mr. Kirkwood's alluring circulars, nearly worn out—"see all it says about mahogany an' walnut, an' bannaners, an' vaniller, an' lemon trees, an' coffee plants an'—"

"Well, an't they there?" inquired Howard.

"Thar! Mebby they air—fer all I know! Mebby they air—but why don't this lyin' paper say suthin' about the brilin' heat, and malary, an' ten thousand million snakes, ev'ry one sure death ter yer, and forty thousand times that many spiders an' tarantylers, an' centerpedes—an' as fer muskeeters an' fleas, law bless you, man, they measure 'em by the acre! Why don't this lyin' account uv the kentry say sumthin' about the things it's most distinguished fer? An' then there's the fevers, an' wild animals, an' savages, an' desolation! It an't fit fer *any* white man, an' the few as air thar an' can't git away are dyin' off by degrees."

"You don't tell me so, Jelks!" exclaimed Howard.

"That's a fac! It's the worst jint fer misery thet I ever kem acrost. An' an't them poor devils as are down thar a cussin' their luck, an' the sharpers as roped 'em inter goin'! Why, it's a tarnal fraud; the whole business is! Hayr I've jest been spendin' three hundred an' forty-two dollars an' thirty cents a findin' it out, an' an't quite done yit; an' I guess I know purty

well what I'm talkin' about. An' now I'm goin' back to Rose Valley. You see, I got kind er tired er the place, business bein' a little quiet on off days, but law bless yer, it seems to me now like a paradise, if it hain't got no bannaners an' vaniller! An' if we do find a rattlesnake now an' then! I'm goin' back ter the ol' woman an' the store, an' if yer ever hear uv any darned fool talkin' 'bout leavin' this kentry, God bless it, fer Costy Reeky, jest you refer 'em to Prosperity Jelks—that's all!"

It might be fair to suppose that Mr. Jelks was prejudiced against emigration, and this colonization enterprise in particular, considering the lavish expenditure his "prospectin' tower" had cost him. But even with making due allowance on his arithmetical calculations relative to snakes and insects, there was still quite enough remaining to cause Estill very disagreeable feelings.

Perhaps there are some natures so firm, and so perfectly trained in business, that they will sneer at Estill as an unpractical, soft-hearted youth for feeling any compunctions about the matter. Mr. Kirkwood possessed such an organization, and it would be foolishly optimistic to hope that every member of his practical class is dead.

Howard felt that in his position he was a silent partner in a diabolical crime. It was impossible to dismiss the subject, and ease his conscience by pleading innocence. He could not satisfactorily

excuse himself on the ground that he had had nothing to do with originating the scheme, and had not actively sanctioned it. He was partaking of the returns of a business, one of whose sources of profit was this deliberately planned system of deception.

The proposition was plain enough: He must either act at once the part of a man of honor, or quietly commit himself to Mr. Kirkwood's demoralizing methods. He blushed to think that he hesitated for a moment which to do. But the considerations were so great—there were prosperity and influence and—far more powerful than all else—love, in the balance against the prospect of poverty and drudgery. For if he broke with Mr. Kirkwood he felt that it would prove an insuperable barrier against his wedding with Olive. He might defer it—what, secure his happiness and creature comforts at the expense of human lives! Was it possible that he could lack the courage to protest against such an inhuman system of fraud, and thrive upon the misery of the poor wretches who were helpless and dying in a far-off wilderness! Could any soul with a mite of compassion submit to such infamous enterprises?

Yet that seemed to be business!

Thinking it over carefully, Estill could not regret, as he sometimes had, that his early train-

ing did not imbue him more thoroughly with business instincts.

While Howard was in this serious state of mind another disgraceful operation came to view through the unhallowed mists of artful enterprise. One of the first things that he had been given to test his latent abilities upon when he joined hands with Kirkwood, was the reorganization of a cotton-seed oil company, that had been for some time struggling along unsuccessfully with a plant in the lower district of South Carolina. Just why it had been a failure no one could satisfactorily explain, as liberal salaries had been paid the manager and superintendent, and it could not be denied that there was ample demand for genuine olive oil in the country. Anyway, its affairs had got into a snarl, and Mr. Kirkwood (who had been one of the original directors) took a larger grasp on it to pull it out of the financial mire.

This simple task he turned over to Estill, whose efficient work of lubrication soon set the mill to going again. He received a block of the stock for his services, and succeeded in securing subscriptions for shares from a number of his acquaintances.

Things had got fairly to going when Kirkwood said to him:

"Isn't it time for a dividend on cotton-seed stock?"

"Time for dividend? Hope you don't expect one already," replied Howard.

"Why not?" demanded Kirkwood.

"Because there isn't anything to divide."

"Hasn't it been three months since we reorganized?"

"Yes, but we have barely paid expenses as yet, and I don't see how you could expect more considering—"

"Oh, we can't let that have anything to do with it," Mr. Kirkwood exclaimed, interrupting him; "the scheme must be profitable from the start."

"Well, but how can—"

"Simple enough, my boy. We hold a majority of the stock at present, don't we? What did it cost us?—about fifteen per cent, eh. Well, what we want to do is to give it a lift. We must declare a quarterly dividend of two per cent."

"My dear Mr. Kirkwood, we may *declare* all we please, but there is scarcely money enough in sight for current expenses, and to *pay* is another thing!"

"Ha, ha, you don't understand," exclaimed Mr. Kirkwood patronizingly. "There's nothing easier. You've realized some twenty thousand dollars from stock sales, haven't you? Pay it out of that. Next quarter pay three per cent from the same fund, list the stock on the exchange,

and it will go like hot muffins at forty or fifty premium."

Howard stared at him in speechless amazement.

"Don't you see, my boy," continued Mr. Kirkwood, with a light laugh; "forty or fifty *premium*—and then we will quietly get out of the cotton-seed oil business." And Mr. Kirkwood rounded off with the sanctimonious joke, that it was a good deal of a fraud, anyway.

Howard got up in a dignified manner. "Mr. Kirkwood," said he, "I came into this company in good faith. I have worked for it with honest motives, and, by heaven, I'll go out of it in good faith! I tell you plainly that I will not lend my name, or be in any way complicated, with such a nefarious proceeding."

"Oh, come, come, come," protested Mr. Kirkwood, "what's the difference? The mill will pay well enough—in time."

"I am not extemporizing with my conscience on any such uncertain terms. I am amazed at your audacity! Such a dishonorable proposition shocks and pains me."

"Well, well, don't lose your temper—"

"I have not lost it—I have full control of it, and I feel called upon to use it as a gentleman should to defend his integrity!"

"Come, don't display any rashness. You evidently miscomprehend me entirely," said Mr.

Kirkwood with quiet firmness, assuming that self-possession and righteousness of demeanor which made him almost irresistible in discussion; and gave him a power of conviction against which many older and more experienced men than Estill had given way against their better interests. "You are altogether too squeamish, my boy. You will have to learn that in this unsympathetic grind of business you must use your brains where they will do the most good."

"Yes, but not where they will do the most evil. Mr. Kirkwood, I am disappointed. You *may* be no worse than other business men, but I detest this whole system of plunder! It is not alone in this, but apparent in many things. I protest against it. I protest against the methods employed by your colonization company. It was only yesterday that I learned how disgracefully deceptive the whole business is."

"Estill, I deny it—you are misinformed! Besides what have you to do with that?"

"Personally, nothing, thank God! But legally I am a partner in this house, and you, as the head of it, are taking the hard-earned pittances from innocent, guileless people, for which you send them to an uncivilized country under the falsest promises that your ingenuity can invent! Don't tell me they are justifiable—I am convinced that they are not! The spot that you are sending those people to is all but uninhabitable!"

"They are not slaves—let them come away," put in Kirkwood.

"They are worse off than slaves!" retorted Estill. "They are helpless and unprotected. Many of them can not get away, and by your own confession, those are the ones you hope to profit still further by! Think of drawing a commission on the misery of heart-broken mothers and suffering children who are dying slowly from the viciousness of the climate and other horrors of a tropical wilderness! *This* scheme is shameful—that is unmerciful, inhuman!"

It was a part of Mr. Kirkwood's profession to keep cool and composed under all circumstances, for one in his position must expect to hear unpleasant talk occasionally; but now his face grew white, and it was with difficulty that he restrained his anger.

"Estill, you are insolent," he said, repeating it; "worse, you talk like a young fool—you would do better to remember your place! I didn't take you in here to give me advice—you are not competent to do it!"

"I *may* be a fool, but thank heaven, I am not a knave," was Estill's modest rejoinder.

"I think we are both too angry to continue this conversation," remarked Mr. Kirkwood, impressively. "Your southern blood is aroused!"

"And my native integrity—thank God, that is a Heritage I have *not* lost! but I have no desire to

quarrel. I found it was my duty to place myself squarely on record, and I hope you understand my character now better than you did before." Howard started to leave the office. Kirkwood called him back.

"Estill, my boy," he began, quite master of himself again, "I admire a straightforward man who strikes from the shoulder. Sit down here and listen to me. Whether either of us is entirely wrong or entirely right we need not discuss, but don't you think—calmly now!—that you are making a monstrous mistake, every way, in quitting this place in a rage?"

"I am not in a rage."

"I'm pleased to hear it. Now say you don't mean to leave, and you will appear to have recovered your senses."

"Please don't put it in that way—I haven't lost my senses, or any one of them—not for a moment."

"Granted. Can't you see then, that it would be worse than folly for you to throw over your prospects, perhaps your happiness, in a burst of impetuosity? Do you suppose that any intelligent, practical man in the city would advise you to do as you threaten?"

"I don't know about the eminently practical ones," replied Estill.

Kirkwood winced a trifle, but he was too prudent to permit the young man to leave him under

such circumstances, if there was any help for it. So he kept on applying the balm.

"Different modes of life and different environments make different characters," he said in a half-apologetic way. "According to your notions, I admit that my proposition to you may have appeared flagrant. But you must remember, my boy, that in this line of life it is diamond cut diamond, and after a man has had thirty or forty years' experience at it, with his ups and downs and varying degrees of success, he learns that the only way to keep ahead of the world is to fight it with its own weapons—employ its own methods and principles."

"Then I prefer to fall behind, for I will never do it after the manner you have proposed."

"Very well, let that go then—work your sweet-scented cotton-seed mill according to your own pious plans. But don't fly into any tantrums, and don't be too ready to believe all you hear about fraud and false representations. Just remember that every man of success has his enemies, and that all sharp methods in financiering are not crimes. Why bless you, my boy, if we all went by the golden rule, and that sort of thing, where would all our great millionaires be? And our famous benefactors?"

"I think there would be more benefactors and fewer great millionaires, which would suit me just as well," said Howard.

Kirkwood looked at him for a moment, as if he considered him almost incorrigible, and doubted whether he ever could make a financier out of him. But he kept on talking, and craftily slurred the conversation over tender places, bringing it up finally to questions of plain business, and managed it so that their parting was much after the usual way.

Watson Kirkwood exerted a winning influence. In spite of the duplicity of his character, as Howard had discovered it, he could not feel an entire contempt for the man. There was something in his nature that he could not help liking. As they came down the steps together, Mr. Kirkwood talking earnestly, a distressful-looking fellow in plaintive voice interrupted him, begging for a few cents to buy food.

"What," snapped Kirkwood, "hungry eh?" as if he was surprised that anybody should go hungry.

"Haven't had a mouthful for two days," replied the beggar, and his appearance corroborated his word.

"Here's half-a-dollar—play that as far as it will go against sausage and potatoes," said Kirkwood carelessly, and resumed his conversation as if the gift and the admonition were alike such trifling incidentals that he had bestowed them without breaking his train of thought, or even suspecting that he was performing a charity. It might have been the trick of an actor, but, if so,

it was so artistically done that it was not without effect, even upon Estill.

Nevertheless, Howard was left in anything but a satisfied frame of mind. He was in an unpleasant mood all the evening, and saw no one. After all, he felt that he had only half-performed his duty, and that in a more dramatic manner than was absolutely necessary. Could he hope ever to reform Kirkwood's methods? He would first have to reform Kirkwood. There was so little probability that he could exert sufficient influence to change his ideas and tactics, that it seemed absurd even to think of.

And from deploring Mr. Kirkwood's shortcomings, his thoughts would revert to Mrs. Kirkwood, and Blake Harrell, and to what certain people likely enough were saying—and altogether he was "perplexed in the extreme."

The next evening he went to see Olive. She divined in a moment that something was causing him unusual trouble.

"Darling," he said to her gravely, "I have been very unhappy for two days."

"Why didn't you come to see me before?" she inquired innocently.

Under almost any other conditions, no doubt he would have sought the panacea thus kindly suggested much more promptly.

"Has your father mentioned the talk he and I had together?" he inquired.

"Why, no. What about?"

He knew that would be the first question.

"About business—nothing but business. And I'm extremely sorry to tell you that it was not entirely harmonious."

"Oh, Howard dear, don't say that!"

"I must. I find that—that we differ very materially in some of our views, and in the most important way possible. We had a very plain discussion over it yesterday, and I came so very near leaving the place that I have felt considerably estranged from it ever since."

"Why, Howard, you amaze me! Has papa been abusing you, dear?"

She did not disappoint him—he expected that question too.

"Not in any way that you might imagine. As I said, we differ. I don't like to tell you just how. Enough to say that I believe I was entirely in the right, and that the difference is too serious to hope for its passing away. Indeed, I fear it is irreconcilable. If it had not been for considerations of you, I should not have hesitated a moment to quit straight off."

Tears came into Olive's eyes, and then there were more questions and consternation. Howard evaded the real facts as well as he could, but yet it was impossible to explain the situation and conceal all the truth. It seemed a little surprising to him that she should fail to consider the

difficulty as insuperable as it seemed to him. But then, he philosophized, woman's perceptive faculties are not as keen as man's, and Olive could hardly be expected to comprehend the case fully without knowing the facts as completely as he did.

"Why, you talk as if it was something that would separate us," she exclaimed at last.

Howard remained silent for a few moments before replying further. At length he said—

"Olive, it is a very serious matter. I feel almost certain that there can never be much sympathy or confidence between Mr. Kirkwood and myself. We may continue amicably for a time, but I believe that a break between us is inevitable. It is a terrible thing, Olive, for a family to be divided against itself. Be courageous now, and let us consider the matter prudently—"

"Oh, Howard, Howard, don't speak so—I can't!"

"But think of the probable consequences—take time."

"No, no, I don't want to think of it, for a minute."

"But I feel it my duty to."

"Howard," she interrupted calmly, "do you love me, or not?"

"Darling, my life, I adore you," he replied fervently.

"Then don't let anything in the world separate us."

"No, no, darling—not after this," he replied clasping her closely in his arms. "It may mean poverty—"

"And I will endure it with you cheerfully," she said. "Don't be too critical with poor papa—he is so good-hearted and kind, and if you can't get along, separate, and don't be enemies, and we will all be happy, anyway."

After this advice, simple as it was, Howard felt as if he might have been magnifying his distress a trifle. Anyhow, now that Olive understood, it was something off from his mind. But he determined to seek other business connections without delay.

The following week, Olive went to Boston on a visit, and to assist at the wedding of a very dear friend; and Howard became more studious of evenings. One night as he sat with his books, he was surprised to receive a call from Mr. Blake Harrell. At first he was on the point of refusing to see him, but upon second consideration concluded that it would be more prudent to discover the object of his visit.

Mr. Harrell was even more suave than usual, and his deportment would have led an unknowing one to assume that it was quite the customary thing for him to drop in upon Mr. Estill for an hour's chat.

"Indeed, one can be expected to keep up only a few of the acquaintances that he forms. One is taken up here and there, and drops out there and here—ungratefully, sometimes, no doubt. However, promiscuous friendships are really undesirable," remarked Harrell with perfect *nonchalance*.

Howard said nothing, but appeared to be waiting for Mr. Harrell to tell what he came for.

"I have regretted that we have not come together oftener of late," said Harrell, after a few more idle observations; "one doesn't like to break squarely off from an agreeable acquaintanceship that he made under such pleasant circumstances, you know. Ah, I presume you have observed my absence from the Kirkwood mansion during the last fortnight?"

"Yes," replied Howard, without any expression of regret.

"Well, you know very disagreeable little scenes will occur now and then, and you are probably aware that one blew up between Mr. Kirkwood and myself?"

"It seems to be common intelligence," said Howard.

"And you understand, of course, that out of self-respect I could do no more than discontinue my acquaintance with him."

"I should consider it a politic conclusion," re-

marked Howard, "especially as he requested you to discontinue your visits to his house."

"Well, I suppose that you fully understood the nature of—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Harrell, it would not be very entertaining to me to enter into a review of the matter," interrupted Howard.

"I fully appreciate your sensitiveness," answered Harrell, "and knowing Kirkwood as you must it would be superfluous for me to dwell upon his ungentlemanly disposition."

"I have no desire to appear rude, Mr. Harrell, but knowing my relations with Mr. Kirkwood as you do, I must remark that you show poor taste in speaking of him in such terms in my presence," said Howard with very distinct enunciation.

"Oh, possibly it may appear so to you at this moment," Harrell answered, no more abashed than if Howard had asked him to have a cigar. "But when you hear my full explanation, the case will present a different aspect, I assure you. Everybody is aware that Mrs. Kirkwood is a charming lady, and that her husband acts ridiculously whenever a gentleman in society makes himself agreeable to her. In this instance he has treated me with positive rudeness to my face, and spoken in slanderous terms of me behind my back. I have treated it with indifference, but deem it my duty to you, as a friend, to inform

you of certain things which my acquaintance with the family threw in my way."

"Mr. Harrell, you are putting yourself to unwarranted trouble in bringing me gossip about the Kirkwoods. If you please, we will drop their name out of our brief conversation."

"With your pardon, it has nothing of the nature of gossip in it," continued Harrell, refusing to be suppressed. "What I have to tell you is a family secret of vast importance to them, but much more to you. It will show you Watson Kirkwood in the true light—"

"What was the source of this alleged secret?" demanded Howard.

"I was just coming to that point. You know Mrs. Kirkwood—"

"Stop! Are you going to say that Mrs. Kirkwood divulged any information to you that—"

"Exactly—a fact that you are entitled to know."

"Harrell," exclaimed Estill, "I prefer to believe that you lie! I prefer to believe that the mother of the girl I am to marry is above taking a rascal like you into her confidence!"

"Well, it may not have been a matter of confidence exactly, but that she divulged the secret, intentionally or otherwise—"

"And you are blackguard enough to come to me with a family secret that you accidentally learned, to vent your venomous spite against a

man who admitted you as a gentleman into his house ?"

"Pray don't be so uncomplimentary till you have heard me," continued Harrell. "I wished merely to do you an act of kindness. If there is a skeleton concealed in the Kirkwood closet—a secret which directly affects your personal interests—"

"Hold, you scoundrel!" exclaimed Estill, advancing with ominous gesture, "stop your vile mouth! Utter another word concerning any member of that family and I will break your jaw! You came up here like a contemptible villain to poison my mind and traduce reputable people! It befits the office of a blackmailer! You are a viper among men! Leave my premises—and I warn you solemnly that if ever I hear one word of detraction from you concerning me or mine it will imperil your safety!"

CHAPTER XII.

SOCIAL SECRETS AND SOCIETY TRIUMPHS.

If Harrell had had designs upon Estill's happiness, with or without consideration of the Kirkwoods, he could not have succeeded better in effecting them if he had been allowed to talk *ad libitum*.

After he had made a very unceremonious exit, Howard paced the floor for an hour. His excitement would not pass away readily. Harrell's dark insinuations had sufficiently disturbed the gray matter composing his medulla oblongata to make an indelible impression there, and although he might continue to denounce the wretch to his heart's content, and assume that he was a liar as well as a scandal-monger, he could not unhear his words.

To be sure, it was his proper course to pay no attention whatever to them. That was what he felt. It was quite another thing to be governed by this gentlemanly conviction. High-spirited young men do not like to be haunted about dark secrets in families they are booked to marry into. In spite of himself, he would fall to wondering what it could be. Perhaps some dishonest trans-

action of Kirkwood's—but that would not be likely to remain a profound family secret. Perhaps some ancestorial disgrace—less likely than the other. Possibly it might be . . . heaven preserve them all! If he was going to run off among the possibilities, there was such a dark, horrible, agonizing assortment to choose from that he shuddered, and tried to turn away.

Then he fell to meditating upon his unique position—was ever an honest, proper-acting young man beset with such uncertainties and distressing problems, all brought about by a marriage engagement, which, from the world's point of view, seemed eminently propitious and desirable!

"It simply shows how much the world really knows about us," Howard soliloquized gloomily; adding, "about some of us," by way of postscript.

It occurred to him that it might have been as well, if he had made some quiet inquiries about the Kirkwood family beforehand. What did he really know about Kirkwood's antecedents? Practically nothing. He knew they had lived in New York for years, that Olive was born there; that she had lived in Montreal awhile when she was a little girl; that Watson had some remote relatives there—who were his relations, anyway? He had never met one of them in his life! Strange that he had not remarked that fact before. There were some of Mrs. Kirkwood's

people living over in Brooklyn—cousins who came from Georgia, as he understood. And Mrs. Kirkwood herself—there he was, back to his original conundrum. He was satisfied on one point—that she had ruined her health by the extravagances and exposures of society life, which she began when she ought to have been still in school. Late hours, dancing, fashionable dressing, artificial stimulants, cosmetics—to say nothing about doctors—that was Mrs. Kirkwood. At least that was all he knew about her, and (he had to acknowledge it) therein lay a good part of the rub.

But it made no difference—he was going to marry Olive Kirkwood. He felt satisfied that she was a good, innocent girl, and he was going to keep his engagement in spite of all these distressing obstacles. She had promised to share poverty with him, if need be; and he would share disgrace with her, if any came.

But the serious fact obtruded that Mr. Estill was rapidly growing old under this strain of anxiety and business responsibility. The clerks in the office asked each other why he was so moody and preoccupied. Mr. Kirkwood did not fail to observe it, and remarked to himself that his son-in-law-elect was unquestionably a peculiar character. There might be, after all, one honest man in the world.

Two or three days passed after Harrell's un-

fortunate call, and Olive had not yet returned from Boston. He had the usual information that Mrs. Kirkwood was feeling poorly, though having a great many callers; and fearing to disturb her, had not gone to the house.

In the middle of a busy afternoon, a messenger came down with the communication, that Mrs. Kirkwood wanted very anxiously to see him before night. Mr. Kirkwood was out of the office. Howard did not wait for his return, but started at once. There must be something of special importance, or she would not summon him in that manner. Perhaps she wanted to have a quiet talk with him alone. It was possible that she had something of unusual interest to say to him. It might be the secret!

If there *was* anything of the skeleton order in the household, and she was aware that Harrell knew of it, she might be impelled, for that reason, to tell him, anticipating that the fellow would divulge and exaggerate it. Besides, she pretended to repose great confidence in him. The more he meditated on his way up-town, the more probable it appeared that this was her object, and the more devoutly he hoped it was.

He found Mrs. Kirkwood in an unusually nervous state, and alone. Even Hopson was away. The footman was the only servant visible anywhere. The house appeared never so cheerless to Howard as he entered. The day was raw

and inclined to be stormy. The prospect from the windows was unpleasing.

Mrs. Kirkwood received him in her boudoir. She was clad in a loose gown, and drew a woollen wrap about her shoulders. Her hair was not by any means as artistically arranged as usual. Almost for the first time, he saw her without a vestige of ornament.

There was something about her appearance and manner that impressed Howard with a feeling of pity. Her customary vivacity of speech seemed to be wanting. Her face did not wear its ordinary composed, self-complacent expression, and whether his own state of mind had anything to do with the impressions it received of her, or not, it was certain that he had never before entered her presence under quite so dispiriting conditions.

"I hope you are not feeling ill to-day," he said.

"Oh, I am so awfully nervous," she replied. "Why, you can't imagine how I feel. And such a disgusting day!"

"Perhaps you have been too much alone—no doubt you miss Olive terribly."

"Yes, of course, but it isn't that, so much. Come—don't sit off there, I can hardly see you! Sit here."

Howard came nearer, and was struck more forcibly with the unhealthy appearance of her face.

Her skin was wrinkled and rough, of that sickly, rusty complexion that the continued use of cosmetics leaves, and there was absolutely no lustre at all in her eyes; those eyes that were so famous for their color, and whose artful glances had set so many hearts to beating wildly.

"No doubt you have been over-exerting yourself," he remarked.

"I haven't been out of my room to-day. I haven't seen a soul. I have been saving my strength for to-night—for the Grand Duke's ball at the Academy—and it's so terribly provoking to feel worse than ever!"

"That is discouraging," replied Howard sympathetically. "And the weather is conspiring with your nerves to keep you at home."

"But I won't submit! I *must* go—and I will! "Oh, don't be startled because I jump so. Every little noise sets me off. I wish people would drive more carefully when they pass here! No one seems to have the least bit of regard!"

"Come, don't allow yourself to notice such insignificant things—it's half in the imagination."

"That's right, lecture me—everybody seems called upon to do that!"

"Indeed, I had no such intention—"

"Oh, don't mind—I'm glad you came, anyway. I wanted to talk with you."

"I'm very glad you did," answered Howard hopefully.

"You see, Hopson's sister, or somebody, took ill, and the poor soul has to neglect me; and Jeanette had to go somewhere—somebody of her's dying, I believe. It's strange what terrible inconveniences deaths are, isn't it? I really wonder how I will look as a corpse!"

"Pshaw, now, that's something you shouldn't worry about."

"But other invalids worry me, and just at a time when I intend to go to the Grand Duke's reception. Oh, dear!"

"Things do go wrong sometimes," Howard assented.

"Bless me! how awfully fidgety I am—don't you notice it? Really, it's agonizing!"

"You do seem to be somewhat uneasy, but don't think about it."

"Hear the boy talk! 'Don't think'—the idea! Goodness' sakes alive, how I do wish that window over there would stop rattling!"

"Which one? I haven't heard a click of it." And Howard proceeded to examine the frames.

"Oh, not these—I mean the ones over there—across the street!"

"Why, heaven save you, Mrs. Kirkwood, you can't hear a sound from those windows."

"It doesn't make any difference—I can see that it is going on! How? Why, by the reflections of the trees in the panes—just see them jog

back and forth? Oh, I know they are rattling terribly!"

"I'll send word for them to use weather-strips," Howard kindly promised.

"You are a dear, good boy—but they will be so obstinate they won't mind you—oh, I know how everybody is when my comfort is concerned! If you had ever been racked with neuralgia you would know how to sympathize with me!"

Howard said he could anyway.

"I feel as if I was going to have erysipelas, too! Now isn't it terrible?"

"Horrid to think of," assented Howard.

"But a thousand times worse *to have!* Why can't a man be made to feel sometimes what a woman has to endure?"

Howard tried to humor her, and lead her mind to pleasanter subjects.

"Oh, I can't talk about anything while I'm feeling so," she declared. "I want you to help me—"

"Didn't you wish to tell me something?" he asked.

"That is just it. That is why I sent for you—I want to take you into my confidence."

Howard believed that he was getting very near to the secret, and readily promised her loyalty and sympathy.

"You must not tell Mr. Kirkwood, will you?—

not even Olive? For you know, they can not understand how I feel!"

"Probably not at all," replied Howard evasively.

"It's cruel, and that's why I am going to confide in you. Now, you must promise—"

"Certainly—tell me what it is."

"I want you to get me a few grains of morphine."

Howard started. It was so entirely unexpected that he hardly knew what to reply.

"Only a very little," she continued, "and you needn't say anything to them about it. There, go now, before anybody comes home."

"Indeed, you disturb me, Mrs. Kirkwood," he stammered. "If Mr. Kirkwood doesn't desire you to have such a dangerous drug, it is without doubt—because he feels—"

"Now don't go to telling me how dangerous it is, and what it will do—I know all about it! There's no danger of my contracting the habit—I need only a very little, and nothing else will do."

"Does the doctor prescribe it for you?"

"Oh, the doctor has given it to me a hundred times!"

"Then why don't you send for him?"

"They have made him believe it isn't good for me, and he is quite as foolish as they are! Oh, dear, why will people be so stubborn and silly! And see me ready to fly to pieces!"

"I'm really very sorry for you, Mrs. Kirkwood, but—"

"What, an't you going to get it for me? You promised you would—oh, you did—and you are not going to be so unkind as to refuse. Oh, Howard, dear Howard, please—please get me a little morphine—please do—only two grains!"

Howard Estill's feelings at this moment were all but overpowering. The discovery that Mrs. Kirkwood was addicted to the use of the vile drug, her pleadings, his awkward position, quite disconcerted him.

"Mrs. Kirkwood," he said, at length, "I do not feel that it would be right for me to do as you request. Surely not without the sanction either of Mr. Kirkwood or your physician."

"Oh, dear, you are as unfeeling as they! I truly believe that you are all conspiring to get me out of the way. Well, you will accomplish your ends—I won't last long!"

"You do us a great injustice Mrs. Kirkwood," Howard replied firmly. "It is not right for you to accuse us of such wicked motives. If Mr. Kirkwood takes this course I dare say he has fair reason and advice to warrant it. As much as I would like to serve you, I must decline to do it in a surreptitious manner."

Mrs. Kirkwood shed a few tears, but finding Howard firm, attempted to become more indifferent, and came near growing hysterical.

Before Howard left the house, Mr. Kirkwood arrived home. He went to him promptly, and told him his experience.

"I'm sorry to hear it, my boy," remarked Watson. "It is an unpleasant thing to confront. Mrs. Kirwwood was doctored with the damned stuff till she has grown to require it constantly, and I have feared for some time that the habit was growing upon her. Last week I changed doctors, and we determined to stop it, if possible. For several days he reduced the doses, and finally withdrew it altogether. This week we sent Hopson and some other servants away on one pretext or another; I gave the stableman strict orders not to send her any carriage, instructed the footman, and we hoped it would be impossible for her to get a supply. I suppose, however, that she'll get it someway."

Mr. Kirkwood was quite right in his supposition. His dearly beloved (conventionally speaking) had wits, and used them. Very soon after Howard left her Hopson returned. Now Hopson had strict orders, but she was not proof against the coaxing and commanding and cajoling, and, above all, the bribery, of her mistress. Hopson capitulated. She made one or two clandestine excursions from the house, bringing back various small parcels, and about eight o'clock began, with the assistance of Jeannette, the laborious process of dressing Mrs. Kirkwood.

There was much system to be observed. The subject must not be exhausted in the mere preparations. She had been without morphine for three days, hence she critically calculated that its effects would be unusually exhilarating.

"Bless you, Hopson, you dear, exasperating thing," exclaimed Mrs. Kirkwood, when the woman returned with the indispensable ingredient; "give me only a quarter of a grain *now*—just enough for a slight stimulant while I am dressing."

This was swallowed after her bath, which was taken in tepid sea-salt water, as being the most stimulating, with a light after ablution in soft water, scented with rose-fragrance. When the articles of flexible silk, and most delicate white, fringed with embroidered art, had been donned with the least possible exertion, Jeannette, an artiste of mysterious skill, began wooing back the lost favors of Youth, in a way that came near throwing envious Father Time into a "conniption" fit.

First, madam's neck and arms, as well as her face, were not as smooth and soft as they once had been. Her skin was beginning to show a slight effect of shrinkage, or contraction, while here and there were positive wrinkles. Jeannette opened small jars of almond cream and cocoa butter, and began a rapid application which softened and enlivened the cuticle, and added a brighter smoothness to throat and shoulders.

This Jeannette accomplished with the adroit touch of a sculptor, rubbing and modelling in such a manner as to obliterate all suspicion of angles and emaciation.

Then the top was taken off from another small porcelain box, which contained a secret preparation labelled *mascaro*, and into which the artiste dipped a dainty brush. With this she went over the eyebrows, touching them into more perfect outlines, and imparting to them a deeper color. Even the eyelashes were carefully tinted and made to appear longer and more drooping.

And yet the acme of artistic skill had not been reached. True, the almond cream had charmed away the crow's feet, and the modelling had done much to discourage the approaching effect of hollowness, but still the face was far from perfect.

Mrs. Kirkwood, seated close before her mirror in a flood of searching light, watched every motion with eager anticipation, not refraining from frequent admonitions and advisory suggestions.

"Madam must not be impatient," Jeannette would say.

"But you are making my face look *long*, Jeannette. . . ."

"Pardon, madam, I have done nothing to it yet—wait till it is finished."

This was not a very politic answer for poor Jeannette to make, for it clearly implied that age,

and not her awkwardness, was making inroads upon Mrs. Kirkwood's beauty.

"For heaven's sake Jeannette, don't exasperate me so!" exclaimed Jeannette's subject; "you *must* have more regard for my weakness and nerves!"

"Oh, it will soon be done, madam—and the effect will be delightful, magnificent," replied Jeannette encouragingly. The while she began going over the carefully composed face with almost invisible application of rose-leaves, beginning high up and shading down. Her very motions were marked by graceful curves, as if she would have feared to mar the picture by imparting to it something unpleasing, if she had been violent or awkward.

A soft pinky hue, born of these blandishments, spread over the cheeks, masquerading in the grateful guise of the complexion of health and a happy disposition. *That* was true art; and heightened by the perfect contour that the rounding and shading produced—an effect of girlish plumpness.

And now, after Hopson, who had been busy all this time laying out and inspecting the grand robe and jewels, had administered another "fourth" of morphine, Jeannette turned her attention to Mrs. Kirkwood's hair.

Perhaps madam's wavy locks of natural blonde were fading a trifle here and there—losing just

a very little of the luster of youth (for blondes do not silver), and appearing rusty by contrast? Most surely. But, happy souls! Jeannette didn't speak of it in that way. She suggested that a very little tinging would enhance the general harmony. Madam consented.

So Jeannette deftly touches up those rusty spots with peroxide of hydrogen, and makes them bright. The pretty tresses are brushed and caressed as if the dresser were coaxing them into a willing mood. Everything had progressed beautifully so far (everything considered), and now if the hair can only be made a success! Carefully and gently the folds are made, and the light primping done. Everything must be sacrificed to produce a youthful effect—Jeannette knows that by instinct. It is lapped low behind, and worked into enchanting undulations.

Then the hairdresser stands back to survey it from a distance, and Mrs. Kirkwood, more whimsical about this part of her toilette than any other, complains that it is horrid! They try again. The undulations and frizzes are brought lower around her temples and forehead, the roll behind is made to appear heavier and thicker, the jewelled comb is inserted—oh, who could complain of it now?

Mrs. Kirkwood says she thinks it will do. Being now in a state of high-finish, and feeling the exhilarating effects of her medicine, she proceeds

to a short rehearsal before the glass. Where one cannot be made up *exactly* the same every time, there is need to study the expressions that are best suited to the occasion. Mrs. Kirkwood had a large and varied assortment of smiles and glances, and she rapidly tried on one after another. Extremes, of course, were to be avoided.

There was something not altogether right. Suddenly she sank down with an exclamation that amounted almost to a scream.

"Jeannette—Jeannette!—what have you done? Can't you see—you have entirely forgotten my dimple!"

Heavens, it was true! Jeannette had shaded right over the place where the dimple came when the owner of it smiled her most bewitching, and made no calculation for it at all! Hence the effect was almost lost—at least greatly weakened.

She had to erase a considerable space and work it over again, shading artfully around the dimpled spot, so that it became too tempting for explanation, when the smile warmed it into life.

This mishap retarded the general progress somewhat, but still Mrs. Kirkwood was determined not to get into a flurry—every degree of strength and animation must be husbanded. Hopson finished dressing her, then hurriedly donned her own wraps. For Hopson must go too, and take along restoratives.

Before assuming her overrobe, Mrs. Kirkwood

leaned very carefully back upon a couch, while Jeannette stooped over her with a small glass tube, topped with a rubber bulb. In it was belladonna.

"For goodness sake be careful, Jeannette, if you should let a drop of it run down my face I would be ruined!" said Mrs. Kirkwood, in the most cautionary tones. But no such calamity was permitted to occur. Jeannette, with steady hand, and almost imperceptible pressure upon the rubber bulb, dropped a large drop of the strange fluid into each of Mrs. Kirkwood's eyes, and cautiously soaked up the overflow with a dainty handkerchief.

"It is too bad this can not be done at first," sighed Mrs. Kirkwood, "but if it were, the effect would be gone before I reached the ball-room."

"Indeed, ma'am, they are looking brighter already," remarked Hopson. After which she opened the morphine again, administered a "half" this time—and the Radiant Result was freed from the artistes' hands.

It was nearly half-past ten when Floyd Claycourt, who had been imperatively summoned as escort, saw a mass of white satin and ermine folded carefully somehow descending the stairs. From the characteristic greeting he received, though in muffled tones, he felt convinced that his aunt was inside.

Howard Estill had not expected to attend the

ball at the Academy of Music in honor of the Russian Grand Duke. By an unfortunate coincidence, Olive was booked to act as bridesmaid to her friend in Boston, whose wedding occurred the same day—for after a wedding is once arranged for, it is inconvenient to postpone even for the coming of emperors.

On that account Howard had not troubled himself much in the way of anticipation. But the general enthusiasm grew to so high a pitch, and it promised to prove such a very notable affair, that at almost the last hour he changed his mind.

"It seems to me like a vast deal of nonsense and flunkeyism to make such a terrible fuss over a fellow who hasn't done anything—and whose only record is being the son of a formidable old tyrant! Anyway—I guess I'll go down to the ball for awhile."

So he dressed and went. The Academy presented an unusually brilliant appearance, and it seemed as if everybody in town was coming. "I'm really very sorry that poor Mrs. Kirkwood couldn't come." soliloquized he, working his way, not without cosiderable effort, through the throng about the cloak-room; "she no doubt feels it very keenly, being compelled to remain housed up, in her dilapidated condition, and knowing that such a swell affair as this is occurring. How she would have revelled in this splendor and gaiety, if she could have come! But she's badly

shattered, poor woman, and not likely to be out for many a day."

A moment later, as he stood watching the glittering promenade and taking mental notes of toilets most attractive and original, a vision of surpassing splendor hovered near, upon which were eagerly turned a host of admiring eyes. Estill was all but stunned speechless and motionless—it was his prospective mother-in-law upon the arm of Floyd Claycourt! Was it possible!—could human hand have wrought this marvellous change in six short hours! Of all dimorphous characters, she was the most astounding he had ever dreamed of. There was elasticity in her step, and vivacity in her countenance, while her toilet dimmed the brilliancy of those immediately about her.

She wore with queenly fascination a princess robe of pearl-white satin, effulgent with crusted silver. There was an indefinable individuality in the drapery, which fell in an almost unbroken line, from the bust to the hem of the garment, yet clinging lightly, with dreamy undulations, to her seemingly faultless figure.

The front was of rarest white brocaded satin, whose snowy field was resplendently relieved with silver china asters. Flowing more amply from just below the shoulders, the back of white duchess satin still clung to the figure closely enough to suggest a graceful outline—soft and

rich, yet plain in contrast with the gorgeously infoliated front. This swept away into a heavy train, yet not of excessive length.

The voluptuous garment was cut rounded—very low in the front and down to the shoulders in the back, exposing a bust perfect and white "and smooth as monumental alabaster." Following this oval-shaped line was a magnificent rounding collar of superbest point lace, six inches wide, and rich with antiquity. From the shoulders downward, it fell over immense puffed sleeves. Extending well up her dimpled arms were immaculate undress kid gloves.

As she stepped there were visible upon her dainty feet exquisite silver shoes, covering white silk stockings, and bearing heart-shaped diamond buckles. She carried a very large fan of most beautiful white ostrich feathers, from the centre of which lifted a matchless aigrette. The handle was of white pearl, set with diamonds. From the back fold of her light, wavy hair, there rose an old-fashioned rounding-shaped pearl comb, studded with diamonds, and a splendid diamond necklace encircled her throat. Pendents of flawless white solitaires sparkled from her ears, and as she walked she seemed a yielding form of jewelled whiteness.

Howard Estill gazed upon this soft blaze of glory and inspiration of loveliness like one hypnotized. His breath came short and quick, and

a vague suspicion entered his mind that he was in the midst of one of those ecstatic dreams that sometimes entrance us in sleep, and that Mrs. Kirkwood was really still at home in despair. Before he had fairly recovered from this anhelation she was close upon him—he saw her radiating smile, and heard her musical voice. He stepped forward with trepidation, not unmixed with reverence.

She laughed quite merrily when he expressed his congratulations and pleasure.

"Ha! ha! you did not comprehend the full meaning of my words, when I told you that I *must* come," she said. "Alas, I fear you are very much such a tyrant as Mr. Kirkwood!"

While they were speaking there was an unusual flutter and commotion in the assemblage. The illustrious personage before whom all Gotham was bending its adulating knees was at that moment entering. It was the Grand Duke Alexis. Everybody gazed with breathless intensity. They saw a well-formed young man, of medium height. His manner was self-composed, and it was at once evident that he possessed talents for being stared at. His face was oval, rather pleasant, his dark hair brushed back, exposing a good forehead, while small patches of downy beard nestled in front of his ears. He was dressed simply—in a naval frock coat, with open lappels, and two large stars glittered upon his breast.

He bore upon his arm Mrs. Governor Hoffman, and closely following, or clustering about him, with ladies, were such dignitaries as His Excellency, the Governor; the Russian Minister, Catacazy; the Russian Admiral Poisset; Major-General Dix, General McDowell, and a host of lesser satellites. And—perhaps most remarked of all—keeping close to the sacred personage, was a gorgeously uniformed officer of the Russian Imperial Guards, a young man of almost heroic size and figure, and impressively handsome. It would be difficult to imagine a character of more picturesque, yet formidable, appearance. He wore a scarlet dolman, extravagantly embroidered with gold, while a jacket of sheep-skin trimmed with sable fur hung from his massive shoulders. His boots were marvels, and gems glittered in his girdle. In the delirium of excitement many mistook him for the prince, and trembled in awful admiration.

The crush became all but maddening. Wherever the grand duke moved the throng surged around him with curiosity and wonderment in their looks. Those who succeeded in being jostled against him were happy beyond expression. In the eagerness to gain a position near his person very little ceremony was observed.

"Such a paroxysm of adulation is positively disgusting!" growled Estill. "It is the very

height of absurdity—but, bless you, dear fellow, the Americans DO love a prince!"

"But he's such a remarkably fine specimen," replied Claycourt, as if in extenuation. And it must frankly be admitted that Alexis carried himself like a soldier and a gentleman. His appearance was not as imposing here as on the day of his landing-reception, when he wore the full-dress black uniform, with the imperial cross and medal of his regiment. Nevertheless, he was universally declared a handsome man. In the jostle and even rudeness of the crowd, he gave no indication of impatience, but conversed fluently and easily, and was perfectly tranquil in what must have been equally an embarrassing and disagreeable situation.

There was no attempt at dancing till after the banquet, when a part of the throng had dispersed. By that hour Mrs. Kirkwood was greatly exhausted, but sought Hopson in the retiring rooms, and was soon revivified. During this time Estill and Claycourt happened together again.

"My dear boy," exclaimed Floyd, "it's simply frightful—the eagerness of the girls to dance with the duke! Have you seen any of it?"

"Have I seen it!" replied Estill, with a slight curl to his lip. "It affected me so that I came away! Isn't it sad to contemplate—the disappointed hearts there will be when it is over!

Poor things—there are a thousand of them wild with the ambition, and Alexis is not likely to dance more than three or four times. Just think of the blighted hopes that will be taken home to bed!"

The music was ravishing. The first number on the programme was finished, and one adorable triumph had been scored. The second followed immediately, and another heart was saved from bitter disappointment. The Duke was doing grandly. And constantly near him hovered the gorgeously-uniformed officer of the Imperial Guards. His keen eyes were ever alert; it is possible for madmen with evil designs against rulers of the earth to penetrate any assemblage, and Alexis was too precious to leave unguarded a single moment.

Floyd Claycourt watched the gilded Hercules narrowly for awhile, and during this quadrille horrified his fair partner, by whispering ominously that he had caught a glimpse of something with a jewelled handle under the sheep-skin jacket!

At the third number the Duke was missing. The music sounded harsh, the glare of the gas-lights seemed to have contracted an unusual dimness, enthusiasm had departed, and the poetry of motion appeared to have a hard time of it to keep out of slovenly lines.

"Really, I must look up my poor aunt," said Floyd.

"I don't imagine that you have been badly missed," replied Howard. "I saw her the centre of a very interesting set a few minutes ago. But I think you had better bundle her off home as soon as possible. I am fearful of the consequences of such an orgy—and just think, supposing she should collapse flat on our hands!"

But Floyd could not readily find her, and came rambling back. "Wonder if she's really been dancing?" he said. Howard was about to reply, "Impossible," but, remembering her other performances, remained silent.

The fourth number was announced. Would the grand duke dance?—that was the burning question!

Prince Alexis Romanoff, grand duke of all the Russias, had looked around him at the cheap and tawdry efforts at splendor, and came near sighing in weariness. He felt in his heart the emptiness of the display, and half smiled. But the wealth of feminine loveliness around him re-awakened his waning interest. *Their* brilliancy, at least, was unsurpassed in the land of snows and tyranny.

Alexis was susceptible to the alluring beauty of rare gems—likewise of women. Wherever his eye rested, the object was quickly observed by all. This time it rested longer than usual—the Prince *would* dance again.

"Yes, he is coming out," exclaimed Floyd. "It is to be a quadrille. I wonder who he has now?

What !—Estill, Estill, do you see !—its *our aunt !*"

Estill saw, and stood for a moment speechless with astonishment. There she was, radiant, smiling, sparkling on the Duke's arm ! They passed near—the imperial prince was speaking to her in French. Her glances had never been more captivating—there was a perfect halo of glory around her, a glory that she would not have sacrificed had she died the next hour !

She never danced more lightly. Every movement was a graceful undulation. And when the quadrille was finished Alexis is reported to have remarked confidentially to Admiral Poisset, that she was "otzen preckrasnaja e umnaja zenscina," which a newspaper reporter immediately informed the world is Russo-jaroslav, or Cossack-vodka, for "bewitchingly attractive and interesting woman, don't you know !"

Mrs. Kirkwood was immediately taken by her proud nephew and placed under Hopson's care. There was a strange palpitation about her heart, and her difficult breathing showed plainly that her triumph had taxed her endurance to very nearly its furthest limit.

Howard Estill watched anxiously by the door to see her depart. When she came out, he saw that she walked less steadily and leaned heavily upon Claycourt. In spite of her determined efforts to conceal it, there was a look of pain

upon her face. He assisted her in getting through the crowd, and when he bade her good-night, noticed that she could scarcely speak in reply. Her lip trembled, and when she was lifted into her carriage, she sank in Hopson's arms with a groan of distress.

But such a triumph—it was worth a hundred times more than it had cost!

CHAPTER XIII.

A REVELATION AND A RESULT.

MRS. KIRKWOOD'S "next morning," after her night of glorious dissipation and victory, set in exceedingly early, and in point of intensity surpassed all previous periods of reaction. It seemed possessed of an element of diabolical retribution. The severity of the penalty was in an inverse ratio to the splendor and ecstacy of her triumph.

It was nearly three o'clock, A. M., when Hopson bundled her out of the coach and literally carried her upstairs to her room.

Howard made special inquiry about her of Mr. Kirkwood when he arrived at the office, somewhat later than usual.

"Very poorly, very poorly indeed," was the response.

"How does she look?"

"Oh, I haven't seen her, but its safe to say that she's in a very wretched state."

"I hope she met with no mishap in getting home," continued Howard, with laudable concern.

"Getting home from where?" asked Kirkwood, looking up quickly.

"Why from the Acadamy ball," answered Howard somewhat impatiently.

"By the luck of Jonah!" exclaimed Mr. Kirkwood, starting up as if an electric current of about five hundred ohms had been turned into his system. "You don't mean to say that she went to that reception?"

"To be sure she did."

"What—through that blasted weather, with her neuralgia, and debility, and—" Mr. Kirkwood refrained (perhaps prudently) from further extending the catalogue of his interesting consort's ailments.

"She *went—that's* certain," declared Estill. "Danced with Alexis—and all that!"

"Tst, tst, tst," clucked Mr. Kirkwood in astonishment; and then he sat down again. "She seldom surprises me—but that's about the worst march she has stolen on me yet! It's just such damned reckless undertakings as this, that's going to provide an imposing and popular funeral at my house one of these bleak days!—Yes, my boy, she's decidedly wretched this morning, if that's what you want to know."

Estill discovered, by a few more carefully placed questions, that Kirkwood had gone out to his club early the evening before—not finding much to entertain him at home—and, having become engaged in a little game of some kind with a few old cronies who never went to balls,

had not returned till some sma' hour ayont the twal'. Hence his ignorance.

Blessed is domestic felicity!

Olive was telegraphed for, and came down from Boston on the next train. In the afternoon, Estill met Claycourt on lower Broadway.

"Have you been to inquire about your Aunt to-day," asked Howard.

"Yes—I have just come from her."

"How is she?"

"Oh, lord, old chap—she's *sick* this time! Perfectly disorganized and helpless! If it wasn't for having been queered about it so often, I'd feel really alarmed. Upon my soul, I would."

"What do you think we had better do about it?"

"What *can* we do, old chap, but piously say our little prayers, and drink to her better health."

"No—I haven't much faith in either," answered Estill. "It seems to me that we should try to exert our influence to a better advantage than we have. Now, didn't you realize that it was a terribly imprudent thing to take her out last night?"

"Well, it did seem a trifle indiscreet, as it were, but she sent for me—and I was elected. I'll admit that I'm easily influenced, but it would take a man of iron to stand out against my aunt when she says, yes."

"I'm not so sure about that. She gave me a hard turn yesterday, and I didn't weaken."

"Oh, she did, eh—what about?"

"I say, Claycourt, haven't you known that she used morphine?"

"Well—yes, to some extent," replied Claycourt indifferently. "But I don't think there's any danger of that amounting to anything."

"It *is* amounting to something, Claycourt. Hasn't she sent for you during the past few days for any purpose?"

"Not till last night—for the ball—but then I've been out of town for a week. Ayresboro—you know—"

"That accounts for it, of course. Well, the fact is, the habit has been growing upon her, and Kirkwood and the doctor started in to break it up. Yesterday she sent for me and tried to coax me into getting her a supply—which, of course, I didn't. But she got it some way—she was braced up on it last night, or she never could have got out."

"You don't say it!" exclaimed Floyd.

"Either that or something equally mysterious. And what I started to say is, that we ought to do something toward discouraging it. She may not be so far along as to need any special treatment, but she must be made to realize her danger. You know your uncle is rather indifferent, and I fear does not proceed with her just right. Anyway, something ought to be done. Confidentially—the prospect of a confirmed invalid for a

mother-in-law is bad enough, but one with the morphine habit is something I am going to obviate, if possible."

"You'll succeed if you try," said Floyd, encouragingly.

"And I want your co-operation," continued Howard. "I find that it won't do to be too diffident. I believe that certain reforms in Mr. Kirkwood's family would be advantageous every way, and if I become a member I'm going to undertake them."

"Bravo!—that's worthy of a Gracchus," exclaimed Claycourt, "and it shows your great sense in trying it *beforehand*, you know."

Howard called promptly at the house that evening, and Olive and he had hardly been long enough together to renew their acquaintance fully, it seemed, when he was informed that Mrs. Kirkwood requested to see him.

He went to the little boudoir. Mrs. Kirkwood had managed to leave her bed, but her appearance was indeed pitiable, and doubly so to one who had seen her in the full blaze of glory the night before.

"My dear Howard," she began, "I forgive you, if you were unkind to me yesterday."

"Well, now, that's very generous of you," replied Howard, smiling at the nature of her magnanimity.

"Yes—I knew you would be glad to acknowl-

edge it, but—oh, I am so wretched to-day! Isn't it the strangest thing imaginable that I should suffer these dreadful relapses so frequently? I really thought I should die!"

"I think I am able to account for some of them very easily, my dear madam. Don't you think that if you had not gone out last night, and had been taking proper precautions every way, that you would be much better?" Howard sat down near her while he spoke, and there was something earnest and sympathetic in his voice.

"But one cannot stay cooped up forever,—it's as bad as being in a tomb! Oh, don't let us quarrel about that—it isn't what I called you for. I have known something for a long time that I should have told you, but hardly dared to."

Howard trembled at the sound of her words. After all, there was something mysterious in concealment.

"Yes, I have wanted to tell you, but have been restrained. To-day, when I felt that I might die any moment, there was something that told me I had been very wicked and selfish, and I felt more keenly than before, that it was awfully wrong for us to keep this secret from you any longer. To be sure, we reasoned that the way things were turning out, it would right itself sometime—but that is not the right way."

Mrs. Kirkwood paused, and sighed distressfully.

"Well?" said Howard, interrogatively, as much as to remark that he was listening attentively for the rest of it.

"I have sent for Mr. Kirkwood," she replied, "and don't want to tell you till he comes." At that moment Mr. Kirkwood entered.

"I hope you are not worse, my dear," he said conventionally,

"Watson, you see I have Howard here," she began, ignoring his fond greeting. "I sent for him because we had something to tell him. Now you know we have, Watson!"

"Really, I wasn't aware of it, my dear," replied Watson, with a serious air.

"You know we have," snapped Mrs. Kirkwood, "and I am not going to have it deferred an hour longer! Supposing I should die here—as I'm liable to any time—would he ever hear of it from you? No, Watson, it's not likely. Come, now, be a straightforward man and acknowledge your wrong, and I will acknowledge my share in it."

"I fear you are quite too much excited to-night, my dear, for us to trouble you further. I think Estill and I had better retire—"

"Not till you have done as I wish! And if you refuse to do it, I will tell him myself!"

"You are delirious, my angel; come, Estill—"

"Watson Kirkwood, stay where you are, and do not act like a coward!" she commanded, with a spirit that fairly startled Howard.

"I do not claim that I have been more righteous than you, but I am willing to acknowledge my wrong. Do you refuse to tell him? Very well—Howard Estill, this is the man, the father of the girl you are going to wed, *who robbed you of your inheritance!*"

Howard arose, and grasped a chair, as if to steady himself. There was a moment's silence.

"Now I have cleared my conscience," exclaimed Mrs. Kirkwood, sinking back upon her sofa, as if her divulgence of the fact had righted the whole wrong.

"I can't understand what you mean, my dear," said Mr. Kirkwood suavely; "evidently you are feeling the effects of your stimulants, or have been dreaming."

"Howard, you are able to judge whether I have my senses or not—pray, do not insult me as my husband does."

"Oh, my angel, please don't take it in that spirit," exclaimed Kirkwood, apologetically. "I did not mean—"

"You meant to discredit my word! Don't attempt it again, if you have proper regard for me! I repeat it, Howard—we are the ones who have had your estate all these years. True, we believed at one time that you were all dead. I was really glad that we came together, for now it will all be yours some day."

"Madam, I thank you fervently for this act of

justice," said Howard. "I do not doubt for a moment that you told the truth." He took both of Mrs. Kirkwood's hands, she pulled him towards her and kissed him, and in a moment was in a paroxysm of hysteria.

"Really, my boy, this will hardly do," said Mr. Kirkwood. "I think we should leave her at once. There, my dear, you have done your duty —we will talk about it further some other time."

Howard said "good-night" to Mrs. Kirkwood gently, and the two men left the room together. Howard went direct with Mr. Kirkwood into his library.

"It's really amazing," remarked Kirkwood, in a tone of relief, at the same time taking out a cigar, "really amazing what extravagant vagaries people are capable of who indulge in morphine. Now, there's Mrs. Kirkwood—a person of really very moderate imagination in her normal condition. And yet, because she had heard us discuss your loss, she takes it up and fancies that we are to blame."

"She *fancies* it, you say?" queried Howard.

"Or dreamed it," continued Kirkwood, perfectly calm, and speaking in his customary self-confident manner. "She has had such spells for some time—usually worse after some extraordinary excitement."

"Are you pretending to talk seriously, Mr. Kirkwood?"

"Pretending! I *am* talking seriously." And Mr. Kirkwood simulated a little surprise at Estill's quiet question.

"Kirkwood, your audacity amazes me!" said Howard. "You are the craftiest man in your methods, and possess the greatest stock of unalloyed brass of any man I ever knew! Your nerve and cunning compel my admiration." Howard spoke deliberately, as if he were telling Mr. Kirkwood about some other remarkable character.

"Your compliments appear somewhat ambiguous," replied the recipient of them. "Anyone could readily see through my wife's odd whims when they become a little accustomed to them. Ah, will you have a glass of brandy with me,—I am not feeling exactly right through here to-night." And he put his left hand upon his side.

"No, Kirkwood—stop this dissembling—it disgusts me! You know very well that your wife told the truth. Now don't try any longer to palaver or cajole me into believing anything else! I am convinced that you are the man who defrauded me and my sister, and I shall take steps at once to prove it, and recover!"

Mr. Kirkwood grew more restless, and Howard had only once before seen him as pale as he turned now.

"It is your privilege to try," he half gasped, as he tossed off a glass of brandy.

"It is not only my privilege, but my duty, to recover my own. Kirkwood, I am pained, sickened by this discovery! It weakens my faith in humanity! How any man can sleep o'nights with such a load of fraud and dishonesty in his heart, is past my comprehension!"

"Come, come, Estill," said Kirkwood, convinced at last, that further attempt at evasion was futile, "don't be distressed. Consider the circumstances, and present conditions, and it will not appear so flagrant."

"There is no extenuation of such a crime!"

"Oh, my boy, don't be so impetuous. It cannot possibly be placed under the heading of crime. The law would not class it as such. It would only be termed a breach of trust at the most."

"The name matters nothing—you have robbed me," burst out Estill impatiently. "Yes, robbed me—and now stoop to cavil about names for it! I find that you are every inch the swindler I suspected you of being!"

Kirkwood dropped his head, more crestfallen and subdued than any man had ever seen him before.

"My dear boy," he began mildly, "your accusations may be just. I have wronged you deeply—I admit it. All that I can do now is to reimburse you—which I will do fully. Heaven judge me,

it is what I have intended to do ever since you came in my way."

"And if I had not been so fortunate—"

"There, don't speak of that, my boy—let it pass. You shall have every dollar, and more! I promised your father—to return fifty thousand dollars—he placed in my keeping, and it shall be yours. We were business acquaintances—your father and I. I took his money to Canada during the war. My dear boy, I am not feeling sound—let me explain the rest of it to-morrow."

Mr. Kirkwood was visibly distressed. He walked unsteadily to his room,—and Howard, still trembling with conflicting emotions, returned to Olive.

She had been waiting for him anxiously, half divining that something unpleasant was occurring.

"What kept you so long, dear," she asked immediately.

"Oh, my innocent darling, I don't know how to tell you," he replied. "Indeed, so much has been transpiring during the last week, that I am dumbfounded. There, I don't want to talk about it any more to-night—I am nervous and weary now. It's all about business, you know. I'll tell you some other time. There, sweetheart, put your hand upon my temples—so. Heaven bless you—"

At this moment an ominous commotion was heard through the corridor. Both sprang up and

rushed towards the door. They heard a stifled groan—an exclamation of horror from the footman, a woman's scream, and Mrs. Kirkwood flew past them! They hurried to Mr. Kirkwood's room, and found him fallen on the floor. His face was livid. Howard lifted him to a couch near by. His head fell back, a single groan escaped his lips—and he was *dead!*

If Watson Kirkwood explained the rest, or any part, of his irregular transaction on the morrow, it was before the Supreme Judge of all acts and motives—and we may reverently hope that He treated the case leniently.

Consternation and grief ruled with ruthless sceptres that night in the house of the dead man. Mrs. Kirkwood for an hour seemed to forget her physical weakness. Remorse added to her sorrow, and for awhile she was well-nigh frantic. Poor Olive, if less excitable, was even more pitiable in her distress.

"Oh, Howard, Howard—bring him back—don't let him die!" sobbed the poor girl, long after life was no more.

"Oh, poor papa—darling papa—you were always so good to me, so kind! I did not love him enough, Howard; he never refused me anything in his life!"

All the other tributes which those who knew Watson Kirkwood sincerely or charitably be-

stowed upon his memory were not equal to this.

Howard Estill stood by the side of the lifeless form, and solemnly gazed upon the pallid countenance, while the grief around him touched him to tears.

"He wronged me—but I forgive him," was his only utterance.

Within a few minutes the sad news was out, and a number of friends arrived. A little later Howard met Floyd Claycourt as the latter entered the house.

"What's the trouble here, old chap—is something the matter?" asked Claycourt, who had accidentally dropped in.

"My dear Claycourt, haven't you heard?—it is death," answered Estill.

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Claycourt dolefully. Then it *has* come at last! Oh, my poor, dear aunt—may Heaven keep your soul!"

"Hush, Floyd—you are wrong," interrupted Estill in a thick voice, "your aunt still lives—it is Mr. Kirkwood who is dead!"

And Floyd Claycourt dropped into a seat as if he had been shot.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ERA OF REFORM, AND A TURN OF LUCK.

ALL the next day, as people passing by saw the black folds of crépe upon the door of the Kirkwood dwelling, they sighed and said—poor woman, she is really dead at last!

The gossipy club man saw it, and lightly meditated upon the evanescent nature of earthly glory. He promptly mentioned Mrs. Kirkwood's lamented decease to his cronies at luncheon, and added a chaffy sort of tribute to her interesting qualities.

"She was a stunning woman in her day, by Jove," he drawled, "and kept her looks pretty well to the finish—but guess that last dash with Alexis was too much for her shattered constitution."

Most women said it was "no wonder," and most men expressed some more generous word of sympathy. But later on, all agreed that Mrs. Kirkwood made an exceedingly attractive widow, and that she dressed the character in exquisite taste.

An administrator was appointed for Mr. Kirkwood's estate, who, together with his attorney

and Estill, began an investigation into its affairs. The only will that turned up had been made sev eral years before, and bequeathed all his worldly goods to Mrs. Kirkwood.

The investigation had not proceeded very far before Howard began to feel alarmed. Obligations that he had never heard of began to appear, and creditors of defunct concerns that Kirkwood had at different times been connected with, became clamorous after his death. Large blocks of valuable securities were found to be hypothecated, while numerous items that paraded imposingly upon the ledger in the guise of assets shrunk to worthless scraps (except as souvenirs of the late financier's genius) when their true character was exposed. There was one note for a large amount made payable to Mr. Kirkwood, indorsed by Mr. Kirkwood, and which bore the bold but ornamental signature of Mr. Kirkwood's wife. That was capital—in one sense, at least.

The title to the homestead stood in Mrs. Kirkwood's name; it was a valuable property—mortgaged for all it would endure.

The further they got, the worse it grew—it was a most discouraging case of shreds and patches.

"His methods would be excellent models for ambitious young men to study, who contemplate going west to grow up with the budding country," remarked the administrator grimly.

"Excellent sir," replied the attorney, in a

purely business way, "the opportunity has not been neglected. At least a dozen have graduated from this establishment—we'll hear from them a few years later."

"But where did he get his $30,000 a year to live on," exclaimed Estill, who had grown weary and thrown up his hands.

"From the generous contributions of the confiding public," answered the attorney.

That seemed to be about all there was left to say. So Mr. Estill went home and meditated. Few young men have ever found and lost a fortune in shorter time than he had. It seemed to be gone this time, *for sure*. Yet the loss of it did not appear so important, after all, in the comprehensive sweep of the general chaos. While these things were revolving in his mind, he was honored with a call from Mr. Murchison.

"Since the decease of Mr. Kirkwood, I have concluded to lay before you the facts concerning your estate, as I have discovered them, and trust to your equitable nature," said Murchison pompously. "I am able to show you conclusively that he was the man who became possessed of it, and that he conciliated your lawyer, Sticey, into silence. Sticey finally was sent to prison—"

"And you in turn accepted Mr. Kirkwood's hush-money," exclaimed Estill, rudely interrupting him.

Perhaps Mr. Murchison was unfortunate in the

time he had chosen to visit Mr. Estill, but in any case that young gentleman had grown so disgusted with the tales and instances of fraud and chicanery, that he was temporarily out of patience; and before the disreputable old Insect of a lawyer could declare his own spotless integrity, he found himself grasped by a hand like a vise, which suddenly imparted a turbulent, whirling motion to his anatomy—a sort of spinning, as it were, which lasted with infinite variety down a flight of nicely carpeted stairs; and which so charged him with a contempt for ingratitude that he immediately washed his hands of the Estill case, and never turned one of them over again in its behalf.

It took a couple of months for those engaged in the business to find out just how bad things were, and at the end of that time they returned a verdict, that they couldn't possibly be worse.

As might have been expected, Estill made no attempt to reserve anything. Mrs. Kirkwood stood it pretty bravely till it came down to the brownstone mansion, and then she complained and wept. But it went. In fact, it was impossible for her to comprehend it at all—the way everything went! Howard even turned over his stock in the South Carolina cotton-seed oil mill, without even mentioning what a splendid chance it once had of being cultivated up to the forty or fifty premium.

A great many harsh things were said, most of

which, it must be admitted, were sufficiently provoked by the facts as they came to light, but they were none the less galling and humiliating to the impoverished family for all that. Mrs. Kirkwood had shone too radiantly not to have enemies—it was surprising now, the number there appeared to be in their ranks, active or indifferent. They said it was a positive disgrace to respectability—the false colors she had been sailing under all these years. This was the feminine attitude. As a rule, the men remarked that it was too bad for a woman of her style and spirit.

Howard was without place or prospects, and Olive, once an envied heiress, was now penniless. So they got married. The way things had been going, what was the use to discuss prudence?

There was not the least element of ostentation about it, however. Floyd Claycourt came forward. He had a very comfortable fortune—why it hadn't someway been engulfed in the financial maelstrom which his distinguished uncle had so successfully operated, was a living problem, and won Floyd the credit for being enough-sight sharper than he appeared.

But, anyway, he came forward, and chattered encouragingly, while assisting Howard to take a small house much further up-town. Into this they moved, from the big house on the avenue. And right in the nick of time, a snug position

opened for Howard in a large real-estate broker's office.

What a revolution it all was to Mrs. Kirkwood! It must be confessed that her grief for the loss of her husband, which was really violent right at the first, very soon wore away. Probably the excitement of other affairs, and anxiety for her future welfare helped divert her mind from it. At any rate, she did not pine away to deeper misery.

When Howard Estill came resolutely upon the scene, after Mr. Kirkwood's death, he devoted special attention to the widow. He showed diplomatic skill in his treatment of her, that few were able fully to appreciate. He did not forfeit her esteem or confidence by a single act, but all the time gradually ingratiated himself into a complete mastery over her.

One great circumstance in his favor was her recent widowhood, which of course withdrew her entirely from the dissipations of a society life. There was no more getting out of a sick-bed, priming with stimulants, and scurrying off to the opera, or to dance with grand dukes. Consequently, there were fewer and far less violent relapses.

Then Howard began with the doctors. There had been a couple on her pay-roll regularly, who came alternately, felt her pulse, prescribed what she wanted, and presented exorbitant bills. Both

were promptly discharged. Mrs. Kirkwood declared she should die, but Howard amiably insisted upon having his way about it. With the doctors went the thousand and one concoctions, the effects of whose diverse and conflicting properties might well have insured a permanent victim to pharmacy.

By the time they moved into the small house, Mrs. Kirkwood was feeling better—but still needed a stimulant. There was the great danger that Howard contemplated, but he did not despair. All the old servants were discharged. When it came to Hopson—there was the affecting struggle. But Hopson had to go. It was plain that the work of thorough reform could not go on to a successful end with her in the house. The good creature was very much distressed at parting from her "dear child," whose care had been such a burden to her for so many years; and the thought of Mrs. Kirkwood getting along without either maid or nurse, when it had been previously quite as much as she could accomplish with both, seemed altogether preposterous.

At first it appeared equally so to Mrs. Kirkwood. What, she and Olive keep house with only one servant in the whole establishment!! The idea was so overpowering that she expressed a sorrow that she had not passed away in one of her terrible relapses, before the disgrace of such poverty fell upon her.

But Howard very soon convinced her by the simplest kind of arithmetical calculations that it was the very best they could afford, and that while it was humiliating to his own proud spirit, he was going to meet the emergency like a soldier, and hope for better things in the future. Olive was quite of his disposition, and instead of repining at their downfall, took hold with a goodwill to make their little home pretty and cheerful. Her enthusiasm had its effect upon her mamma.

Most human natures require the discipline of necessity to bring out the best there is in them. Legions of namby-pamby creatures go through life in a dawdling or whining manner, never rising above helpless inanity, who no doubt, in the straits of emergency, would develop capable, or even admirable qualities. Mrs. Kirkwood had never been suspected of being anything but a fashionable sort of doll. She would have shuddered at the thought of having to dress herself unassisted. That was the Mrs. Kirkwood of the palmy days of Watson Kirkwood's monetary maelstrom.

Within a year of the time she became a mother-in-law, she was very much another person.

Howard Estill's diplomacy worked almost like magic. He not only put a strict embargo upon Mrs. Kirkwood's favorite drug, but soon convinced her that the use of morphine was quite as

disreputable as injurious. Results soon began to corroborate his teachings, for she suffered less from "nervous prostration," and had fewer agonizing pains to complain of. Her temper improved and sweetened—she was less whimsical and tyrannical. She herself was surprised to find how wonderfully beneficial her new mode of life was. She did not dread the task of going up or down stairs as of old. Her eyes were brighter, her arms and neck were plumper, her skin smoother, her complexion clearer. Those of her old acquaintances who saw her, remarked that she had not been as beautiful for ten years, and inquired who her doctor was now? No wonder at all that Mrs. Kirkwood was proud of her son-in-law, and respected his wisdom!

When they got snugly settled in their new home, Howard brought Florenee to live with them. This was a move that he contemplated with some apprehension, for the poor girl needed much tender care, and there was already a great deal of waiting upon one another. If Mrs. Kirkwood should rebel, or take a dislike to the gentle invalid, it would make things very unpleasant. There would be something extremely disagreeable in having to send her back to the country again, and admit that his mother-in-law made the house too small for her.

But he took occasion to talk about the plan quite a good deal, incidentally, and gradually got

Mrs. Kirkwood to assisting in the preparations, as a matter of course.

So Florence came. Olive was really delighted to have her with them, and made her reception a very jolly one. The truth was, Mrs. Kirkwood conjectured that she would prove a good deal of a bore; and if her opinion had been respectfully asked at the first, she would have shaken her pretty head. Not so much because she feared the additional care in the household, but she always felt a keen contempt for the rawness and awkwardness of country people—and of course, she didn't suppose Florence could be anything but an uncultivated country girl. But she saw the necessity of making the best of it, and put on a pleasant, patronizing smile with which to greet her.

Their first evening together, gave her much more favorable opinions. Florence was naturally intelligent, and Howard had always kept her well supplied with books; being much of the time left to that resource for entertainment, she had read a great deal, and her store of miscellaneous knowledge was superior to that of most girls of her age. Besides, she had, like her brother, a considerable gift of fluency.

"I have no doubt it appeared very confusing to you—the noise and bustle of travel, and of the city," remarked Mrs. Kirkwood, in her most musical tones.

"Oh, yes, it did," replied Florence. "I have so often wondered what a really great city was like—and for that matter I'm wondering still, for I have only caught a superficial glimpse of it."

"And you really have never seen a city before —how strange!'"

"You know I have scarcely seen the world at all. I was very small when I was taken to Ayresboro, and too ill for much observation. So it has always seemed to me as if I could not be very far away from my old Southern home. You know I am only an unsophisticated little Southern girl."

That was already a good point gained with Mrs. Kirkwood, who still regarded Southern people as superior beings.

"And Ayresboro is more of a Southern village than a Yankee town," suggested Howard.

"I am really glad to hear that something can be said in its favor," replied Mrs. Kirkwood, whose memories of the place were not of the brightest.

"Really," said Florence laughing, "I never quite got over my childish curiosity about the Yankees, all the time I lived at Ayresboro. You know, during the siege of Vicksburg, where I lived, we used to be told awful stories about them, and we little ones imagined they were a sort of bogies. I know I was somewhat surprised, when I first saw them, to find they were common-looking men.

"Indeed, I shall never forget that first time," she continued. "During the siege we went with some kind people to stay in a cave which was made in the side of a hill. There were a good many of them occupied so, for they said the Yankee shells could not harm us there. They were made comfortable, but it was so strange and quiet, keeping candles burning all day!

"One day, after General Pendleton had surrendered, and the blue-coats had possession of everything, I ventured out on the side-walk, and saw two Yankees coming toward me. Everybody was looking at them curiously, and I imagined they must be unusually ferocious. One was a tall man, and had on a very fine uniform. The other was rather short and stout, and didn't wear any sword. Both had short whiskers—and, oh, such sharp eyes!

"Of course I was scared, and ran back into the cave; and what did they do but come right in, too, with some other officers. They all looked around as if they were surprised at the place. The tall one with the bright uniform talked a good deal, but the shorter one nodded, and smoked, and didn't say much. But when he saw that I was crying with fright, he took his cigar from his mouth, and stooped down, and patted my head.

"The tall one looked down with his sharp eyes, and said—'General, you seem to be fond of children.'

"'Yes,' he answered, 'I have a little girl at home, about like this one.' It sounded so kindly that I stopped crying, and when the tall officer stooped down and kissed me on the cheek, my fear took wings.

"When they turned to go, people whispered that they were General Grant, and General Sherman! And it was the greatest mystery to me, why, if they were so gentle and kind, they could be burning our houses, and killing and starving us!"

Howard turned away when she came to this, for his mother had perished in that siege, and the illness Florence contracted in that damp cave had made her an invalid for life; but he always carried in his heart a feeling of gratitude toward the illustrious soldiers who had halted to pet with a word and a kiss his frightened and unprotected little sister.

One day, not long after Florence came to live with them, Howard entered the house smiling and exultant. He bore pleasant tidings.

"That wilderness of ours down in Alabama," he said, "is turning out—not exactly a blooming paradise, but blooming rich! Bless you, no end of hematite ore in it—solid from the surface down! Queer we never suspected that!"

"What's hematite—gold?" asked Olive; and as Howard laughed, the other two guessed, "silver."

"No, no—*iron!*" replied Howard.

"Oh," they answered in chorus, very much disappointed.

"Iron—millions of tons of it! And what do you think—those audacious smelters down there have been working it without saying even, if you please! The owner didn't happen to be around, and they just helped themselves! If this isn't growing to be the worst age for grabbing! There seems to be a lot of fellows with a sort of swinish voracity, who are trying to gobble the earth!—Pack some things in my satchel, Olive—I'm going down there with determination and two lawyers, right away! Guess when we begin to draw a royalty of twenty-five cents a ton on that ore, with a few thousand down for what's gone already, we'll be a little more comfortable. *Hematite* ore, mind you!—where's my travelling-cap?"

This time things went Estill's way. He soon succeeded in bringing the miners and smelters to terms, and found himself in independent circumstances. His income from the furnaces was steady, so that not long afterward he became interested in the business, and took charge of the company's office in the city.

One day Florence said to him—"Do you remember the gypsy fortune-teller, Howard?"

"Yes," he replied. "Queer how things turn out—isn't it?"

Mrs. Kirkwood's spirits began to look up again.

A year later they took a larger house, which circumstances made somewhat necessary, and as Florence's health became gradually stronger, so that she could walk about, they were a very happy family.

Floyd Claycourt had been absent a year—on his wedding tour to Europe. It was Bessie who went with him. They were now back again, and calling at Estill's. Happy? Well—hear him talk:

"You have no idea, old chap—no idea what a perfect delight of a girl she is! She's like a June rose the year round—and when it comes to sweetness, the rose an't in it! Smart, too, old chap—s-m a-r-t! Picks up things quick as a flash. Knows more now about picture galleries and ruins and such than I do, and I've been over there twice before. Isn't it perfectly marvellous, old chap? Ha, ha, you made sport of that Winchester of mine, but I told you that when I took it out I'd bag something, sure!"

"Yes," replied Howard, smiling indulgently. "But how do you like our new home?"

"It's a beauty—shows your ideas all through. And what a bonanza that Alabama ridge turned out to be—the most valuable part of your Southern Heritage, after all. But tell me, how *did* you manage it so miraculously with my dear aunt? It's the most perfect case of reform that a fellow

ever effected with his mother-in-law! And she *is* the most remarkable woman— "

"Hush, Floyd!" exclaimed Mrs. Kirkwood, tripping lightly into the room, "if you chatter so loud you'll wake the baby."

THE END.

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